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ISRAEL MORT, OVERMAN

A STORY OF THE MINE

BY

JOHN SAUNDERS

AUTHOR OF 'ABEL DRAKE'S WIFE' 'HIRELL' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

HENRY S. KING & CO., LONDON

1876

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THE FIRST VOLUME.

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ISRAEL MORT.



INTRODUCTION.

BORROWING, for a few brief moments, the wand of the sorcerer Science, who can do what other sorcerers only promise—raise up the dead—what does Science show in connection with that particular spot of ground where lies the scene of the ensuing story?

The light, which almost needs some other word to express its inconceivable splendour, is at first too dazzling for the spirit-vision to see aught that it can comprehend.

And when the eye has grown accustomed to the fierce blaze of sunshine, and to its reflections in the vast and near mirror, the sea, the difficulties, while changing, grow rather than lessen.

It is a new world that is gazed on—a world in which all objects are strange, unfamiliar, and seem as unreal as a dream-picture—a world young, and revelling in its youth, and in all that youth can give it of beauty, strength, profusion, and riotous life.

Gradually this world, at first boundless as its sea and sky, narrows to the sight, and displays a forest rising from a lagoon, the water clear as crystal, and, where its colour can be seen, of the deepest blue.

A forest in which the grandeur and stately elegance of the palm-like and other lofty trees, the ideal perfection of loveliness in the tree-ferns and other low-growing plants, and the amazing fecundity of the exquisitely beautiful herbage, seem as nothing in comparison with the novelty of their forms and characters, or with the impressiveness of the fact that actual human eye has never gazed upon them, or their progeny of true lineal descent (some few fossilised forms only excepted); that they came into being—lived innumerable ages—and then died, innumerable ages before the earth knew man.

But our guide fails us. Before such a scene of enchantment Science itself cannot reveal worthily the traits of that primeval time, except by taking to its aid a still more potent auxiliary—Imagination. Thus only can it restore something of the infinite variety and of the wondrous structure of the vegetation.

The scaly, and embossed, and medallioned, and interval-ringed giant stems; the branches with their endless varieties of expression and foliage; the gorgeous flowers; the rich fruit-clusters; all more or less unknown to us now, but suggestively indicated by the petrified remains of the few forms that survive in that shape for our instruction and delight.

And so with the forms of animal, and insect, and bird, and fish, and reptile life, seen perched in the forest canopy, or winding about the tree trunks, or roaming with vast bulk, crashing as they go, through the dense jungle, or basking in the fierce heat of the direct sun-rays, or cooling themselves in the depth of the waters of the lagoon, with preposterous snouts just emerging from the surface.

It is the place and time for reptile and

amphibious life, strange, grotesque, monstrous! And with these, as with the plants, only the few, and these the least important in the scale of organisation, will survive, fossilised, for man to know.

Such is the picture indicated by Science and its ally. Our own eyes will help us to the contrast.

The broad lagoon has shrunk to a mere stream descending from the mountain heights to the sea.

The luxuriant, graceful, beautiful, and magnificent vegetable forms—above all, the palms and the tree-ferns, most exquisite perhaps of vegetable structures—where are they? All shrunk to the one unchanging garment of valley, hill-side, and mountain-top—the humble British fern.

But the dazzling light and glory around that lagoon, what have we in its place, to distinguish the existing dell?

Here is the actual picture of the place as it is—unexaggerated:

Where the centre of the lagoon was, is now a black, grimy, dismal hollow—a resting-place be-

tween the winding incline of the still beautiful valley above, and the rapid descent to the marshy plain and sea below.

Man is there ; but hardly to give new dignity to the scene of to-day, or to claim due honour for his labours in having changed what was even a century ago one of the loveliest of pastoral scenes into that we now gaze upon.

Men and boys are passing to their work in that blackened, grimy, bare-surfaced dell. Their hands are black, their faces are black, and ghastly through the unnatural glare thus given to the white of the eye. They look haggard, and for the most part are undersized. Their flannel garb is fast assuming the hue of all around.

Black sheds, with more important black buildings of brick, of all sizes and shapes and forms, always excepting any form in the least approximating to picturesqueness or beauty, are grouped in the centre.

Black pieces of new and old machinery, a chaos of iron engines and parts of engines, and beams and parts of beams, and wheels and parts of wheels, and boilers and parts of boilers, and a

hundred other unintelligible things, lie round the buildings, leaving here and there little oases of vegetation—that is to say, of grass—which, unable to turn black, has done the next most appropriate thing, and faded to a lurid yellow.

Black flying bridges high in the air unite building with building. Roads, with black mud, run beneath and between. Flights of black steps descend to the roads. A tall black chimney stands towering near.

Through the indescribable ugliness and pervading atmosphere of sordid squalor that at first glance characterises the place, three objects only stand out in pleasant relief:—the row of bright red fires beneath the engine-shed, the light pure colour of the stone quarry in the background, and the wheels that surmount the hideous scaffold-like structure, built of great beams of timber with uprights, and a projecting angular arm from which hangs a massive rope of wire to support the heavy cage that is continually descending and ascending between the black world above and the still blacker one below.

These wheels are a study. They revolve in

opposite ways, they go at great speed, and are so close, side by side, that the resulting motion is to the eye something unique—charming in its suggestiveness and beauty. They literally twinkle: no other word can express their lovely and silent motion.

There is one other trait, for the moment forgotten. On the black sludgy bridge that leads to the deeper blackness of the pit mouth, a group of birds, some of them of rare beauty and song, are fearlessly hopping about between the very feet of the tram drivers. They are picking up grains of corn, and chattering, and quarrelling, and chirruping, as merrily as if they saw not the actual scene of to-day such as man has made it, but the pastoral one of a former century; or even—if birds, like men, dream of a golden age—of the splendours of the still earlier primeval time, when Nature, as apart from man, was all in all.

See then the two aspects of the same locality; the black mine of Cwm Aber, and the dazzling glory of the tropical forest and lagoon! What is the meaning of so violent a contrast and change?

Would it not be remarkable if it were the very

splendour and ashes of the dead beauty of the one era, that gives all its ugliness and discomfort to the other ?

Would it not be stranger still if out of this ugliness and discomfort should again come the very essences of the light, and warmth, and glory of that morning of the world ; colours which even that time could not outvie ; means of enhancing indefinitely human health, wealth, and happiness, in all sorts of ways ?

And as man is the author of all the degradation one sees here, so is he the hero who creates from it so much that is truly precious.

Man wants coal. He has accidentally discovered long ages ago how valuable a fuel it makes. He has eagerly sought for the storehouses of so precious a commodity. He has pertinaciously solicited Nature to give to him the keys.

She, on the contrary, appears to wish him to understand she has intentionally hidden away the coveted thing where he may never hope to get at it ; far down in the very bowels of the earth,

where human foot has never trod, where no form of life, however humble, can possibly exist.

Man heeds her not, except in so far as he may learn how to circumvent her. Having dug out whatever he can reach from the surface, he prepares boldly to follow the coal, whithersoever it may lead him, through any difficulties, any dangers; to any depth.

Learned men come to his help; and by the study of the earth-rocks, where these happen to be broken through by some primeval convulsion, and exposed, as in great ravines, show him how to track the unseen mineral, step by step, till at a given point they say, 'Strike down boldly there, and you will find it.'

He does so. He bores into the ground, sometimes through long, weary, and most anxious months of unremitting and unremunerative labour, perhaps to find there has been a deplorable miscalculation and waste; but, if so, he only changes the arena where he means to fight out this great battle. He again ventures: and at last succeeds.

Who but those who have continually experienced the alternations of hope and despair can tell the deliciousness of the moment which brings the first tokens of such success—the little handful of coal that emerges from the boring-rod—not once, but continuously, through the space say of a couple of yards? Yes; the promised seam is there, is found at last; and no star-gazer ever looked on a new world discovered with greater exultation than the mining engineer looks upon the fragments of his earthly one; which now ensure reputation to him, wealth to the enterprising speculators, employment to hundreds of the needy, and a something of the glow and glory of the sun, from which all its virtue is derived, to innumerable hearths.

Yet Nature, with her sweet, impassive, sphinx-like countenance, still hostilely confronts him, and says, ‘“Thus far and no farther.” Thou knowest. Be content with that, and with the fact thy knowledge has taught thee, that the treasure thou seekest lies hundreds of fathoms deep. Go. Leave me to the solitudes thou hast already too much disturbed.’

And how does man answer her? 'Where my boring-rods have gone, I too can go, and will.'

So he digs a great shaft down from the surface of the fern-clad soil, making its rounded sides into safe and strong walls at every step of the descent, until he can plant his foot at bottom firmly on the coal-bed; and thence look up as through an interminable chimney to where, diminished to a mere point of light, is the opening indicating the spot where he quitted the safeguards of mother earth.

Now then, surely he has only to strip, and dig away with a will, and be content! The strife is over. Nature owns defeat, and gives up the contest.

Ah no! The strife is now only beginning in its real intensity.

Water floods the bottom of the shaft, and threatens at once ruin to the works, and death to the workmen.

But this had been foreseen and provided for. Man has already erected his powerful engines, and stretched down his pumps, ever lengthening with the depth of the shaft, and now laughs at the idea

of inundation. With sublime audacity he mocks at Nature's law that makes water ever tend to go down; he takes it, as it were, into his hands, even to the volume of a small river, and at once sends it flowing perpendicularly upwards to the surface, straighter than arrow could be made to fly; and having got it there, is only too glad to let Nature reassert herself, and help him by carrying it away in her own manner, and like Wordsworth's stream, 'at its own sweet will.'

Even in this, however, he is often beaten, prostrated, rendered helpless; but only uses the experience to make himself progressively ever stronger, and still more strong, till he sees a dry bottom, and has ample means to keep it so.

Nature *must* now retreat before her assailant; it is, however, only to lie in wait for him in the deeper recesses of the mine; to make his every act of locomotion, of labour, even of breathing, a source of deadly danger, a cause of constant unrest.

How many of us sitting at ease in our light and pleasant chambers, so carefully ventilated that not even the slightest taint may be feared of sufficient potency to shorten the natural term of life

even by the most infinitesimal amount, would have the individual courage, the fortitude to continue such a contest, no matter how brilliant the temptations, seeing that it is not for a day, for a special effort or occasion, bringing with it its own sufficing motive and reward, but for the whole life through, of the actual working collier?

Ah, yes! the world has yet to know, to feel with, and to act justly by this humble, patient, undemonstrative, but truly heroic example of manhood. A model in some respects surely for the whole of his kind. Watch him as he goes daily to his labour, asking no inconvenient questions, parading none of his unhappinesses through the press unto the world, fainting before no obstacles, losing heart at the contemplation of no perils. He simply says, or, better still, feels it without saying, 'This is the work I have got to do, and which, please God, I mean to do;' and this work he goes to do.

Not certainly rejoicingly, rather perhaps sadly, but he goes.

And still the strife proceeds, to even more tragical issues, but varied by incidents that lend

a certain piquant, almost a humorous, interest to it.

Meeting artifice by artifice, Nature one day plays the miner an odd trick. His pick strikes into something that is clearly not coal, and the unwelcome discovery is made that the treasure-house is suddenly empty.

Incredulous miner! He is not thus to be cheated out of his lawful prey. He guesses what has happened—‘a fault’—geologically speaking, but which he no doubt might like to express by a stronger term. He guesses rightly. As if expressly to circumvent him whose whole life is spent in circumventing her, Nature has here broken the seam asunder; and cunningly dropped the yet untouched end some distance below the other, and covered it with intervening rocks as useless as they are baffling to the miner.

Well, the boring-rod is again set to work; the lost treasure re-discovered that had been so cunningly hidden, and down go sloping roadways into it. Man is again victorious.

But at what a cost! Some day or other—however distant, it will surely come, at least so fears

every thoughtful miner—an unlucky accident to a lamp, or a vengeful swinging of it in a moment of passionate anger against the head of a comrade, or a criminal yet scarcely thought of negligence or disobedience in exposing the naked flame to kindle a pipe of tobacco, causes an explosion. Nature during one moment of terrible vengeance seems to make herself visible in all-destroying flame, but those who see her—die. In the space of a breath—a spasm, without even time for a single cry or prayer, the whole of the busy workers in that black hive may be plunged into eternity, leaving not even one solitary survivor to narrate how the ghastly tragedy happened.

Then new efforts:—perhaps a new shaft made, interminable inquests, legislative inquiries, sudden spasmodic efforts to improve—then the old relapse into inaction once more:—and so the conflict goes on.

And will continue to do so, till the hour of truer knowledge, of more Christian-like faith in the ultimate good attainable through brotherly sympathy and help, shall reconcile the combatants.

But when that blessed hour comes, man will

find how true and noble has been the friend he has so long struggled with as his worst enemy—how she has disciplined and elevated him—and how necessary and vital it is to him to sit at her feet in reverence, and learn from her what he so much needs to know.

CHAPTER I.

SPRING-TIME AND STORM.

THOUGH on the fifteenth of March school was still over at the early winter hour, it was not till past five in the afternoon that David Mort came into the little path that led through Brynnant Wood up to the village. An unusually companionable fit had made him loiter with some of his schoolfellows, who were bird-nesting in the copse below.

He had not assisted them ; but, sitting astride on the topmost stone of the stile, had watched their proceedings with a low, reflective whistle ; occasionally offering lazily a word of advice, which he bore to have scoffed or laughed at with unruffled good-temper.

He was going through the wood alone now ; making every little movement in the brambles

below, or in the boughs above, an excuse for loitering or standing still; enjoying the warm sun on his closed eyes; and swinging his satchel in a circle that kept an unseen nest of fledglings open-mouthed with affright, so long as he remained in their view.

It was his twelfth birthday. For six years he had passed through this wood four times almost every day, yet it had attractions for him this afternoon such as it never had before. The truth was that never before had David been strong enough to feel himself a part of the bright strong life of the wood as he did now.

It had been on account of his physical weakness that his father Israel Mort, Overman at the Cwm Aber Colliery, had, on finding him unfit for pit work, apparently lost all recollection of his very existence; scarcely seeming to see him when he crossed his path or when he sat opposite to him at meal-times. Thus David had out-stayed nearly all schoolfellows of his own age, had learnt almost as much as his master was able to teach him, and had arrived at his twelfth year and at a sound state of health with so little notice on the part of

Israel, that David and his mother began to flatter themselves this pleasant state of things might last another five or six years.

David had dreams of slipping one day into the schoolmaster's place ; and he cherished a wild hope that nothing might occur to bring the recollection of his useless existence to his father's absorbed mind till some such end should have been obtained.

On one after another of his schoolfellows—boys who had learned perhaps from the same book as himself—the dread fiat had come. Almost every week David's eye marked some ruddy face grow prematurely old, and thoughtful, reckless, and defiant—or pale, and full of vague, unearthly fears. Then the face would be missing from the familiar row against the white school-room wall—and met no more—except hurrying with the black swarm that passed between the mine and Brynnant—all haste—blackness—whites of eyes, and white teeth.

When David prayed 'deliver us from evil,' he thought of the mine only. When he heard of heaven being above the stars, nothing seemed

to him so natural and certain as that the mine—with all its horrors, destructive fires, and treacherous waters—should be the very mouth of the world of darkness, confusion, and misery beneath.

When one of his companions passed into it, he had his quiet way of mourning for him as if he had been removed from the world by death. He haunted such spots as the young miner had liked best—made gifts to his little brother or sister, remembered him at church and on his knees at night, often woke disturbed by the imaginary sound throbbing through his soft pillow of the ‘chip-chip’ of the pickaxe wielded by the black hand of his playmate in some grim hole too small for any bulkier form than his own to work in.

A keen sense of gratitude for the safety and peaceful sunshine of his own life in the midst of such changes and dangers had had its effect on David’s character; for it seemed to him that no amount of patience, conscientious industry of mind, self-sacrifice in little things, and profound humility of soul, could ever repay God or men for

the peace vouchsafed to him in permitting him to remain upon the open sunny face of the earth, instead of forcing him down into its dark and terrible mysteries.

He began to feel that he led a charmed life, the spell of which a breath might break.

His enjoyment of it was usually quiet ; almost hidden, as a thing to which he doubted his own right ; but in the wood that afternoon everything seemed to help to deepen and strengthen it.

The sky which—each time the white clouds rolled over it—was left clearer and fresher of hue, like a beautiful eye after resting under its white lid—the sky itself seemed tempting David to hope anything, everything.

As this was the time his father would be home, David on any other day would have waited till he saw the little parlour window obscured by steam, so that he might slip in unnoticed, while the Overman, stripped to the waist, was bending—blind with hot water and soap—over a smoking tub, and while David's mother applied the scrubbing-brush or the flannels to his shoulders.

To-day, however, with an utter freedom from

his usual timidity, David strode in, and looked hungrily at the tea-table.

The Overman was taking a rest after his own peculiar fashion, standing with his hands clasped at the back of his neck, and his figure drawn up and thrown a little forward on the toes.

As David on entering had thrown the door wide open, the room was flooded with the light of the March sun, that was just then sinking behind the almost perpendicular wall of fir-trees, shaking their ethereal new-born tassels down the hill-side, across the valley, and making all around look dark or dull by their vividness.

David went at once to examine the tea-table without having noticed his father. Pleased with what he saw there, he looked up with a bright, appreciative smile at his mother, who was touching the cups on the tray. With a most unusual obliviousness she turned, and began to seek for something on a high shelf with one hand, while she held the other against her side.

A sad, patient, stricken-looking creature she was. Calamity did not so much seem to have smitten her by heavy but occasional blows, as to

have kept on her one continual cruel unrelaxing pressure, squeezing her very heart's blood out of her, and leaving reaction impossible.

You could see as she looked on her husband's and son's faces, and as she moved away to put the tea before them, that there was no spring or vital impulse of any kind left in her. She could not even complain. She could only bear in a kind of dull way her life of suffering.

Still a sharp observer might have noticed a difference in the looks she gave to Israel and to the boy. To the one it was a glance of perfectly drilled obedience—that ever waited but to know what was desired from it—without the faintest suggestion of hope or desire that she might give him or herself pleasure from the fulfilment of his wishes. To the other it was at once a glance of tender love and earnest fear, but both shadowed and weakened by the sense of utter helplessness.

Noticing her peculiar behaviour, and seeing that his father was making no preparations for his bath, and must therefore be going back to the pit with the night-shift of miners, David began to think

something had happened there—an accident, a death, perhaps.

The blood rushed to his cheeks, which still tingled from the cutting March wind; and he turned to his father in silent, humble inquiry.

Israel Mort stood just in the stream of light the open door admitted. He was still clasping his hands behind his neck and standing raised on his toes, as if the luxury of stretching was the most complete rest he could have. The whole of him, from the top of a sort of skull-cap to his boots, was black, with the exception of his eyes with their pupils of dull brown and large yellowish whites; with the exception, also, of a slight redness at his finger-nails, and the redness of half his lips where his breath had moistened them. These were well formed, as indeed were all his features; but there was on them a repose almost startling. It was not the repose of a face denoting inward peace, it was the repose of stone. It was a face that reminded one of the front of a house that, from some whim of its inmates, has ceased to be used as a front. If Israel's thoughts might be

called the inmates of his face, *they* certainly seldom indeed (if ever) appeared there. They led a hidden life. Their results might be known in the outer world sometimes, but they themselves were invisible; none saw their coming or their going. The very dulness of his opaque brown eyes was the dulness of eyes that *chose* to be dull; to wear a blind of impassiveness, almost stupor, through which their owner might, unsuspected, study any face he liked as closely as he liked.

The Overman's figure was, perhaps, even more remarkable than his face. It was rather above the middle height; and though scant of flesh, had no visible angle anywhere about it, but a kind of hard roundness from head to foot. Perhaps his clothes, made to suit his own notions of utility and comfort, helped to this effect. Certainly Israel Mort had less the appearance of a man of flesh, bone, and blood than he had of an iron worm; round, lithe, and living; and made to work, and eat, and writhe its way through the stony and carboniferous fastnesses of the earth. He looked, in fact, a diver-born, ready armed and

breathed, to dive again and yet again into that underground, waveless sea of death.

As David looked at his father, questioning with his wide, timorous blue eyes, Israel let the clasp of his hands at the back of his neck snap ; and stretching one towards David, laid it on his head and looked at him steadily with those dull, impassive orbs of his.

David's breath quickened, so did the beating of his heart. His mother looked on.

It was several years since the Overman had taken so much notice of his useless son.

‘Why, we shall be getting *too* strong, next,’ said he, in the loud deep tone of one accustomed to hear his voice muffled and dulled by narrow walls and low roof.

‘He is flushed,’ said Mrs. Mort. ‘Come to your tea, David.’

‘Flushed!’ echoed Israel, drawing his hand over both cheeks. ‘Cool as a cucumber!’ he added, with a slight smile, as he turned from the boy, and went to wash his face and hands.

He had no sooner left the room than David's eyes sought his mother's. He found them fixed

upon him sorrowfully, passionately ; but no sooner did they encounter his than they turned away again.

David crossed to where his mother stood busying herself with some things on the top of an old bureau. He touched her elbow.

‘ Mother ! ’

Mrs. Mort looked round, not at David, but over him towards the door by which Israel had gone out and would presently return.

There was a great resemblance between these two, though David was a picture of health and grace without blemish, and Mrs. Mort was wan and angular. David, too, though blue-eyed, was much darker than his mother, whose fairness had now blanched into a dull, faint colour, which possessed eyes, lips, cheeks, and hair. The thing which made them so alike was the long-endured, never-absent dread, the unmentioned haunting fear that both shared.

‘ Mother ! ’ said David again, in a more rousing and comforting voice.

‘ Go to your tea, David,’ Mrs. Mort said sharply, pushing him by the shoulder ; and glancing up,

David saw his father coming into the room, and looking straight at them with perfectly expressionless eyes.

While they were at tea, David and his mother experienced a moment or two of the greatest relief and peace they had ever known. Israel began to talk of his employer, Mr. Jehoshaphat Williams, and his illness, of the quarrels about his case between the Brynnant medical man and the doctor who attends the people of the mine. While he was speaking David asked himself if he might not be as wrong and unreasonable in his suspicions this time as he had been so many, many times before. But he remembered his mother's anxious, timorous manner. What had she heard to have looked as she did when he came in?

Then he wondered might it not be that after all she had taken her fears from his own face when his father had so startled him? He looked at her, trying to express his feeling that their dread had been groundless. The wan face lightens suddenly.

David was assured. It *was* after all, he felt again, only his own cowardly fancy. His mother

would have feared nothing if it had not been for *his* fear.

He had come home with rather a better appetite than even school, bird-nesting, and the March wind might be supposed to impart. This had vanished completely at Israel's unusual attentions, but now it returned again in full strength. There is no telling how long he might have gone *on* hacking at the quartern loaf with his vigorous little clasp-knife, disregarding utterly his mother's looks of hesitating remonstrance, if he had not suddenly become aware of his father's eyes being fixed upon him.

Israel nodded.

'Eat away,' said he: 'to work like a man, one *must* eat like a man.'

The little clasp-knife fell; the great slice it had just cut lay across David's plate untouched.

He looked again at his mother, but her colourless eyelashes were down as if glued to her pale cheek.

Israel turned to her and said carelessly—

'Mary, just bring that bundle I brought in it's on David's bed.'

She rose and left the room. While she was gone, David sat without raising his eyes, and fully conscious that his father was watching him.

When Mrs. Mort returned, David rose at the sight of her. She had nothing in her hands, but her lips were almost blue, and she seemed scarcely able to drag one foot after the other as she went to Israel's chair.

She laid both her hands upon his shoulder, and, bending down, whispered something that David did not hear. His father, however, noticed her words in no other way than turning to look at her, and saying in his Overman's voice—

‘I asked you to bring them here, Mary.’

She went again and came back with something in her arms. David saw directly what this was—a suit of mining clothes made of a size to fit *him*.

She went up to Israel with them, but instead of letting him take them when he stretched out his hand, she held them so tightly as she looked at him, that he was obliged to rise and drag them gently but firmly from her.

‘Now David, my man,’ said he, throwing them at the boy's feet, ‘put those on.’

‘Father!’ cried David. ‘Mother! what are they for? Oh! you don’t mean, father—’

‘Put them on!’ commanded the Overman, in a certain peculiar tone of his that was very rarely disobeyed. ‘Obedience first, David; questions afterwards.’

In two or three minutes Israel was contemplating, with grim satisfaction, what seemed to him a small but promising imitation of himself.

One thing annoyed his eye as he surveyed him:—

‘Mary,’ he said, turning to his wife, ‘give me a pair of scissors: we must have nothing straggling and ready to catch at things; this hair might be in the way.’

By this time, however, Mrs. Mort was perfectly useless. She had fallen into a chair, and sat watching them like one spell-bound.

David felt that, unfit as he was to speak, the moment for his appeal had come. He would make one desperate attempt to touch his father’s heart; he would tell him all his hopes, his little

plans of how he might be a man by other means than this.

When Israel took the scissors from the bureau and began to cut his hair, the boy considered that perhaps it would be as well to wait till he had finished, lest it should seem this trivial act had anything to do with his emotion and resistance.

All at once, while he was wondering how nearly his father had finished his novel task, David had a leather cap drawn firmly down over his head, and felt himself approaching the door in a grasp of iron.

Two simultaneous cries, expressing all the fears that had tortured two hearts for years, were heard from end to end of the rows of miners' cottages known as Pekin.

Some of the neighbours running out from their doors to learn what that shriek of 'Israel!' and 'Father!' meant, saw the Overman's figure, with a smaller one beside it, passing swiftly in the twilight.

Two women whispered together—and hurried to the Overman's cottage.

Opening the door and looking in, they saw by

the firelight a woman sitting on the floor, looking wildly at a little heap of light hair beside her.

Seeing them, she lifted her eyes and arms, crying out—

‘ Yes, it has come at last ! Oh ! God, have mercy —have mercy upon him ! ’

CHAPTER II.

SHOWING HOW AN ANGEL APPEARED TO DAVID.

THE way to the mine was, for a short time, through a wood, which was in parts so dense as to create an artificial darkness.

Somehow David felt that this darkness was necessary for the fearful occasion, and that such a horror as putting a young shrinking soul and body into the dark mysteries of the earth could scarcely have been committed in broad open daylight and sunshine.

He wondered feebly whether he might perchance be saved if, when they got free from the wood, the sun burst out again and shone upon his father's face, so as to shame the hard and cruel resolution from his eyes, and slacken the iron grip of his hand.

He looked up askance at him, and tried to

shape some faltering words that he would say to him; but the hard features seemed to grow to iron, and even to assume something of the tinge of iron in the subdued light.

Israel noticed the effort, and said in a less harsh voice than usual—

‘All right, boy, we’re fairly off now. It’ll soon be over, and you’ll laugh at your own fears when you get back home. I dare say I was a bit uncomfortable when I first went down, though I can’t say as I remember the fact.’

From time to time black figures, each one holding a lamp, or having it hung on the breast, met them; others were passed by them; the former leaving the mine from their day’s labour, the latter going to it, to begin the business of the night.

They all looked questioningly from Israel to David, and back again to Israel; while the boy yearningly, passionately gazed into their faces, seeking perhaps some familiar friend, and asking, in that dumb but moving eloquence—was there no one in all the world who could and would save him?

He dared not speak. The colliers, on their

part, knowing the temper of the Overman, and conscious of his power, moved on, also in silence.

The pair emerged from the wood, and there, immediately before and a little below them, was the exterior of the mine of Cwm Aber.

David thought he knew the whole ugly picture by heart, down to the smallest detail. It was a fearful mistake he felt now. He had looked at it before merely as a scene that being constantly near or before him became necessarily familiar, but about which he cared nothing, felt no curiosity ; and upon which his eyes never rested any longer than they could help, though drawing from it new zest for the enjoyment of his walks over the fern-clad mountains, or through the lovely neighbouring valleys and woods when wild flowers were abundant.

But now he sickened at the sight of the awful-looking place, and the dusky forms moving to and fro, and crowding about the pit mouth.

All that poor David had ever heard and read of heaven or hell, of angels or demons, came vividly into his mind, as he thought of the beautiful world and the playmates he was leaving

behind him, and of the hideous depths into which he was about to descend, guided by these ghastly spectre shapes.

He heard, as in a dream, the measured slow beat of the engine, then its sudden quickening, its violent pantings and rush, then its relapse into slowness and momentary silent lull.

He saw, without being able even to wish to understand them, the beautiful airy wheels revolve on high.

For he saw also the black cage ascend and descend with its human freight, and the thought that *that* would presently be waiting for him seemed almost to deprive the lad of his senses.

Israel still strode on, pitilessly as Fate, with David as the victim in his grasp.

The place of terror—the actual pit's mouth was reached.

The colliers moved aside, in deference to the Overman, and left the way clear.

A moment more, and father and son stood close beside the cage, Israel almost touching it, David striving with all his little strength to keep as far from it as he could.

Then, seeing the sternness of his father's face, and the look of indignant surprise and wonder that accompanied the severe expression, David rallied what little courage remained to him, and said in a trembling excited voice—

‘Please, father, let me go by myself.’

Israel scanned his face just for a single moment, then said—

‘Certainly!’ and waited for David to speak or move.

The boy looked round desperately in every direction, but did not attempt to fly, conscious it would be useless.

Then he looked once more at the cage, and shrank.

‘What now?’ asked Israel, threateningly. Then, after a pause, he said with more gentleness, ‘Come, I shall get in first.’

Israel got in, and called to David to follow.

The boy did not answer, but stood panting, with dilated nostrils and heaving shoulders.

Israel got out again without uttering a word, and went to take hold of him, but David fell on his knees, and, throwing back his brow, on which

large drops of sweat had risen, began to shriek at him.

Again Israel spoke to his son, asking him if he would go quietly down.

Getting no answer, he suddenly lifted David as he knelt, and thrust him in the cage.

Here David clung to his neck so fiercely that he was about to strike him with his clenched fist to make him let go.

At that moment the unknown, unseen angel, to whom poor David had been praying passionately, even though half unconsciously, to come down from heaven and save him—since from earth and man there was no hope—suddenly interposed, and stood between them.

Certainly a more unangelic-looking messenger from the skies it would be hard to conceive. For while, like all the other colliers around, who were busy having their lamps locked, or reclining on coal heaps near the fire that burnt on an iron tripod, everything about him looked preternaturally black or preternaturally white, this man was distinguished by his startling ugliness—due to no natural defect, but simply to the burns he

had experienced in an explosion. These had left the surface of the cheek fearfully scarred and bossed, and had altogether erased one eyebrow—leaving in its place a ghastly line of white skin that seemed rather silk than human cuticle.

But David saw nothing of this; he saw only the bright and kindly eye, and the sympathetic expression of the features. He experienced an instant and immense revulsion of feeling—from utter despair to brightest hope. His guardian angel was there! And in the person of the man next in authority under Israel—James Lusty, his deputy.

‘What, Master David,’ said the cheery voice, ‘going to get a bit o’ experience o’ mining, and larn to be as clever as your father? Ah, lad! that ain’t so easy! But wait a bit, and we’ll see what can be done—won’t we, Master Mort?’

Then turning to Israel, he added—

‘Let the lad alone for to-night, and let him go down with me o’ Monday morning. I know the ways of boys—I ought to, having had eight of my own, and ahl on ’em down in mines in one part o’ the country or another.’

‘ I think, Lusty, you had better mind your own affairs, and leave me to mind mine. There’s the slip in level No. 5 must be seen to to-night ; the roof’s giving. Now David ! ’

‘ Stop, Mr. Mort ! Looking at you and the lad I quite forgot what I came back to the mine for. I have just seen the governor ; he sent for you, and then, when they said you were away, he sent for me.’

‘ What for ? ’ demanded Israel harshly, who had his own particular reasons for letting everybody about him understand there was to be no currying favour with Mr. Jehoshaphat Williams, the owner.

‘ I wondered what for myself, but I had orders, and of course I obeyed.’

‘ Well ? ’ said Israel, impatiently.

‘ I found him very ill,’ continued Lusty, ‘ and in an awful temper, swearing more oaths than I ever know’d the existence of afore, and between whiles axing, “ Where is Israel ? Why doesn’t he come ? What business has the fellow to be away ? ” ’

‘ And what did you answer ? ’

“ Well, sir,” says I, “ no doubt cuttin’ coal, and seein’ it done is the first dooty o’ life, but you see it ain’t easy to do this duty without a bit of eating and a bit of washin’ and a bit of sleepin’ now and then ; and it seems to me, sir, if I may make bold to speak, that Israel Mort don’t get very much of any of these little wants of natur’.”

‘ You said that Jem ? ’

‘ Ask him if I didn’t ! ’

‘ And then ? ’

‘ Well, he looked as I once seed a tiger look in a showman’s cage, when, having got hold of a delicate morsel in a child’s finger, pushed between the bars, he was obligated to let go by a red-hot bar of iron a-fizzing unpleasantly at his hind quarters. And then he says to me, “ It seems to me, Jem, that ahl you fellows care more for my Overman, and what he says and does, than for me.” That made me grin, as I said back to him, “ If we do, it ain’t for want of his well workin’ us, I can tell you, sir ; no, nor for want of his makin’ us ahl do the work cheap.” Then he laughed, and owned there was summat i’ that, and then,

after rapping out another oath, too bad even for me, who ain't partiklar, to repeat, he hustled me off to seek you, and send you to him, and his last speech to me was, "Tell Mort," says he, "these damned doctors think I am dying, but ain't men enough to say so; and that if I do die before he gets here, it'll be ahl the worse for him."'

Israel lost no time in indecision. Just for a single moment he paused, in study, then gave Lusty his orders :

'Go to Rees Thomas, level No. 5. Tell him to take as many repairers as he wants and begin at the far end, choosing for the present only the most dangerous bits. You do the same from this end. So go on till the colliers come to work in the morning, if you don't see me before. Should anything particular occur that needs to be acted on, act at once. Consult together, use your best judgment, agree if you can, but agree quickly; and if you can't agree, let Rees Thomas as night-deputy decide.'

'Ticklish job, Mr. Mort! Them props and cross beams are desperate bad!'

‘I know that. But you’re the very men to be trusted with such jobs. Explain to Rees Thomas why I can’t come as I promised him. He has been worrying me about the “danger,” as he calls it.’

Lusty went away to get his men, tools, &c., and his going seemed to David like a second and more tragic withdrawal of the light and blessedness of the sun.

He waited; every limb trembling with apprehension lest the struggle was about to be renewed.

He saw his father glance askance at him, while he stood pondering over some idea about which he hesitated.

‘David,’ he said, turning to the boy, and speaking in more thoughtful, measured tones than were usual with him in addressing dependants, ‘David, are you man enough to keep a promise if you make one?’

‘What—what—promise, father?’ faltered out David, anxious to please, yet afraid of the consequences.

‘Well, I can’t go down the mine with you to-

night, and I suppose you'd rather go with me when you do go?'

'Y—, yes—father!'

'On Monday morning I expect to have quite other business to attend to, if, as seems likely, Mr. Jehoshaphat dies before then. Are you listening? Do you understand?'

'Yes, father!'

'Now then I'll see if I can treat you as a man. I'll make a bargain with you, if only to see how you can keep it. Give me your word you will go down with me quietly on Monday morning early, just for an hour or two, to see the place and the people at work, and get used to them, and then you shall come up again with me, and go with me to the Farm—if I go—but in any case you shall have the rest of the day for a holiday. Then on Tuesday morning you begin in earnest, with no more nonsense! Now, David, that'll please your mother.'

'Oh no, father!' burst in David, impetuously.

'Well then, it'll please me. Are you man enough to do this—to know the time has come when you must act like a man? Will you

take my hand now, and say bravely, "Yes, father"?''

David's heart was full, and Israel had at last found the way to it. After a few natural spasms of anguish at the renewed thought of the beautiful world behind him and the hideous mine below, he took his father's large outstretched hand between both his little ones, tried to smile, then burst into tears and stifled sobs, while saying,

'Yes, father, yes, I will! Oh, I will indeed!'

'You promise me to go quietly down on Monday morning for an hour or two.'

'I do, father!'

'You promise me to begin work regularly on Tuesday, and to let me be troubled with no more nonsense?'

'Yes, father,' cried David, still holding the hand and pressing it convulsively against his panting breast.

'All right. Fulfil your promise and you shall be a man—perhaps after all a deal luckier man than your father, when you come to see all that I see. Now then go home, and tell your mother that I may be very late—perhaps kept all night.'

David's first impulse was to run, his next to go very slowly indeed, lest his father might, because he saw him run, stop him.

There was only a few yards to pass over before he would get behind a building, and then——

His father was still standing where he had left him. He was sure of that, for he had listened with intensest expectancy for the sound of his step, which he felt he must be able to distinguish. Why did his father not move? He must be hesitating! And David knew instinctively that this letting him escape was not an action natural to his father.

With bounding heart and step he was just about to pass behind the house which contained the gigantic revolving fan for ventilating the mine, when, like the voice of doom, came the one word,

‘David!’

Should he turn or fly? This might be his last chance! No: his father had appealed to him—as a man—he still remembered that; he would turn and go back.

He did so, and Israel met him, and looked and

spoke as pleased in his grim fashion at the boy's obedience. David saw his face, and noted the tone of voice, and felt certain his father had done this only to try him, and he was glad—almost proud.

‘As I told thee, lad,’ said Israel, ‘I may be very late. So thou hadst better hear now what I was about to tell thee in the morning. Mr. Jehoshaphat is to be prayed for at the church to-morrow. I shall be there if I can. Tell your mother you are to be there too—even if she won't go.’

‘But, father—mother is so miserable if I don't go to chapel with her.’

‘Be at the church early, a few minutes before the service begins. You will larn to-morrow, I expect, more than your silly school has yet larned you in all these years. You will larn all about a great man—and so larn, I hope, how to be a great man yourself. Succeed—succeed—succeed—my boy! That's the one thing I and the parson are now going to try to teach you. Now run home—fast as you like.’

David needed no second bidding. Away he

went, with steps almost as fleet as those of the hare, that, after escaping her hunters, suddenly frightens herself with the fear they may again be upon her, and therefore, though unpursued, again takes madly to flight.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH THE REVEREND HORACE JONES
DISCOVERS HE IS AN ORATOR.

THE little church of Brynnant, in South Wales, stands at the very mouth of a winding valley, that is seen high up, emerging from behind and between two mountain-crests, then rapidly descending, accompanied by the music of its own wild stream, till it debouches through the churchyard, as if that were its own particular gateway, on to the broad marshy plain, which here skirts the seashore, protected by a line of sandbanks far as the eye can reach.

The scene is one of no ordinary beauty. The little river—rushing along in a kind of sweet tumult of rejoicing—encircles nearly two-thirds of the churchyard wall; as though the living spirit

of the water, coming fresh, pure, impulsive from a thousand natural springs, and about to offer itself for the use of the people of the village, desired before its contact with humanity to obtain the virtue and assurance of consecration.

To watch from inside the low churchyard wall the circuitous descent of this water over its rocky bed is a constant charm : so many little incidents disturb its course ; so many voices seem born with the incidents and die with them ; so many lights and shadows make it a continual playground. And then, as it approaches a weir, there is such a sudden swirl and rush, as if it were about to leap over rather than glide down across the step-like ledges of the tiny barrier.

Yet, if you lift your eyes but for a moment from the minute details that enthrall you, how great is the contrast ! Noble mountains are on either side, whose majestic bulk and contour dwarf everything about them, and seem to reduce all but themselves to utter insignificance. Even the broad sea, in this its hour of peaceful repose, seems but as a grander moat to these sublime natural fortresses.

It is Sunday afternoon, and people are slowly gathering towards the church, stopping as they meet, in groups, to discuss the all-important event of last night, the dangerous illness of Mr. Jehoshaphat Williams, the oldest living communicant, the founder of their schools, the employer of the bulk of their labouring poor.

And is he really given over by the doctor? Will the curate pray for him? Will he speak of him in his sermon? Does old Mrs. Jehoshaphat, his wife, know? Will she be at church presently?

So runs the ceaseless flow of questions which no one attempts to answer, but which is instantly arrested as an aged and infirm woman enters the churchyard, her right hand grasping a strong stick, her left resting on the arm of a rustic-looking youth, whose vacant face and limp whitish diseased-looking hair, from which all traces of vitality seem discharged, imply degradation of race, and offer a significant commentary on the bold peasantry, their country's pride, of which the poet speaks.

He moves mechanically, just as she impels him,

seeming, indeed, to have no business whatever in creation but to hold that trembling arm—do as it bids him, by the language of hasty jerks or pulls—and move on, with lips apart, and eyes that would be full of wonder at what is now passing, but that their natural power does not extend quite so far.

As man and wife have long been divided, in homes as well as hearts, the whole parish knows of the sad state of the relations between this aged, tottering, but still defiant-looking woman, and the unhappy man, now stricken so low in his solitary dwelling on a spur of the mountain-height. But if their relations had been ever so secret, it would, if we may judge from her present behaviour, have mattered little to Mrs. Jehoshaphat, who is stopping to speak to one of the men as he is going towards the church porch.

‘What, Israel Mort come to church once more!’

‘So it seems,’ responded Israel, confronting her with a calmness that made the old lady irritable.

‘And when were you here last? Shall I tell you?’

‘As you please, Mrs. Jehoshaphat.’

‘Never since you came with him, my husband, when he was what you still are, an Overman on six-and-twenty shillings a week.’

‘It’s very likely,’ said the imperturbable Israel, who seemed rather interested than offended by her attack.

‘Very likely!’ repeated the shrill and angry voice of the old lady; which then sank low, almost to a whisper before she went on. ‘Hark you, Israel Mort—was it also very likely that you who was then his only friend, should try to trip him up, and get his place?’

‘He thought it uncommon likely,’ said Israel, with a grim something passing over his features, that looked like a shadow, but might be his sardonic smile. ‘I know, ma’am, he laughed confoundedly when he found it out, and owned he should ha’ done just the same.’

‘Ay, and he made you his slave ever since, by way of punishment. While he has laughed still more at that, many and many a time in my hearing.’

‘Don’t they say a willin’ slave is the worst of slaves?’ asked Israel; but finding she gave no

answer, answered himself. 'I say he is, and that's what I have been. And now, ma'am, havin' had all your own way—as ladies like to have—I hope you're pleased with me, and I wish you good mornin'!'

Mrs. Jehoshaphat had begun her attack on Israel in a tone of bitter scorn, but it was obvious to him she was moved by quite different emotions than those she allowed to appear. She had continued to the last word to speak as if her thought and her speech were as effectually divorced as herself and husband; but seemed suddenly to lose her self-control, and be seized with a fit of passionate emotion which well-nigh choked her. She shook as if with palsy. Her almost toothless gums went up and down mechanically, as if she vainly strove to continue her speech. After a brief pause, during which the man she had addressed stood silent, gazing at her as if he perfectly understood all she had said or would say, but saw no sufficient reason to interfere, she recovered herself as Israel was moving to go away, stretched out her stick, and touched him with it gently.

He turned, and saw an expression in her face that caused him to retrace his steps.

‘Israel, don’t mind me. I can’t help speaking out a bit now and then. I should go mad if I didn’t. Tell me, how is he?’

‘Mr. Jehoshaphat was very ill indeed when I left him this forenoon.’

‘Not—not dying?’

‘It’s hard to say, ma’am.’

‘You know I went to him on Wednesday last, and conjured him to let there be peace betwixt us, and to allow me to tend him, and try to comfort him?’

‘Yes, I heard of your visit, ma’am.’

‘And do you know the message he sent out to me?’

‘No, ma’am.’

‘He said if he did receive me, and he got better, he knew he should only send me away as before; while, if he was going to die, no help of mine could avail him.’

‘I won’t defend his hardness, ma’am—no; but one can’t help saying it’s something to see a

man with a will in this world o' chattering puppets.'

'Shall I go again to him?'

'If you like, but I can't say I think it'll do the least good.'

'Is his heart so hardened against me even now—in what may be his last hours?'

'He's a strange man. He's been a puzzle to me all my life, although I begin to see my way to the bottom of it. If you let him alone you will find he will act better than you expect.'

'You know something, Israel! I see it in your face!'

'There, ma'am, I must contradict. My face hasn't the habit of betraying its master.'

'But answer me—do you not know something that might lighten my burden? It is not the money I want, even though I like money. No, if he leaves me only the bare pittance he has given me since we separated, but with it a few kindly words or tokens,—'

'Tokens, ma'am, not words, by all means,' interposed Israel.

'Has he done anything of this kind?'

‘If I knew, I should not tell you, ma’am.’

‘Why?’

‘Because it’s sartin he keeps his own secrets, and would expect me to do the same.’

‘Israel Mort—man—remember! He may be dying now, while I may live many years.’

‘Yes, ma’am, and what then?’

‘Why then, fool that you are! can’t you see that I may befriend you, or——’

‘The reverse, ma’am! It’s quite true. But if the time should come that you want me, I put it to yourself whether you’d prefer to know I’d been false to one employer when goin’ to join another. Mrs. Jehoshaphat, I believe I know you as well as most folk, and my opinion is, that though you’re angry now, you’ll be pleased hereafter.’

‘Not with you!’

‘With me, ma’am,’ responded Israel, ‘with me.’

She looked at him sternly, fixedly, trying to penetrate through the hard surface to whatever might lie beneath, but made no further attempt to speak.

He answered her look with one that still further assured her he did know something—not

unfavourable to her—of her interests, and the sternness insensibly passed from her features.

She moved on, passed through the porch, and her face had regained all its customary placid rigidity by the time she sat down panting in the corner of her comfortable high-backed pew.

Israel Mort looked after her with a kind of admiration, as if the thought of confronting hardness with hardness seemed to him like a key-note to his own nature.

The bell was still going, and he knew therefore the service had not yet begun.

He stood musing for a little space, but appeared the while to be simply reading a verse of poetry, newly inscribed, without name or date, on a stone also new, at the head of a little grass-covered grave.

With some effort to abstract his thoughts from the things that pre-occupied them before going into church, he read the verse mechanically, without, however, taking in its meaning—

Weep not for we, our parents dear,
Nor be for ever sad ;
The shorter time we livèd here
The fewer sins we had.

Something in his recollection of the last two lines, after he had turned to go away, caused him to turn back, and see to what children the verse referred.

If anything could startle Israel into emotion, or move that somewhat immovable heart of his, he must have been moved to feel now, as he suddenly recollected that he had once seen these lines at home in his wife's feeble handwriting not long after the death of their two young children. Yes, he remembered that; and how, on the ground of expense, he forbade stone or memorial of any kind to be erected. She then obeyed him. Yet now, after the lapse of three years, this memorial must have been erected by her secretly. He knew the position of the children's grave, even though he had never seen the place since the day of burial till now—yes, it was them about whom he had been reading so carelessly.

But if he felt much, he said nothing, except to ask himself where she had got the money.

He no longer stood to listen to the talk that was still going on in low tones all about him; but, lifting his head to confront whatever face might

seem to ask him why he came again to church after so many years of absence, passed slowly in, and sat down in a corner darkened by a pillar.

The afternoon service at Brynnant is not usually a very impressive one. It is conducted in the English language, for the residents of a neighbourhood who are mostly Welsh. It is a very short service, as though experience, wiser than logic, had taught the necessity of adapting its length to the size of the congregation. And the faithful few who do attend seem to be actuated not so much by their belief in any special benefit they are themselves going to receive, as by the charitable desire to set a good example for the edification of others. This consideration may explain the wandering glances often to be detected there by a curious observer—for naturally those pious philanthropists want to see how much good they may happen to be doing. On the whole, it must be confessed that minister and congregation are alike respectable and listless.

But if no message is ever delivered there that is likely to rouse the torpid as with the blast of a

trumpet, let but some incident of the neighbourhood be touched on, and there is an instantaneous quickening of the attention: eyes become suddenly riveted on the minister; ears listen intently; something that is neither hush nor stir, but an odd compound of both, seems to pass electrically through the place. And then?

Why then—perhaps—banns of marriage are read for the first time between Jenkyn Thomas of this parish, and Ruth Roberts, young members of the church, who have kept their secret so well that ‘the news comes quite unexpectedly’ on their neighbours—that is to say, the whole congregation—and will engross them throughout the sermon, as the curate unfortunately knows.

The general style of the Reverend Horace Jones, perpetual curate, is not eloquent: that must be confessed. Neither are his views nor his illustrations original. But even as he is, without intellectual robustness or vivid colour, how might he not rouse them to themes of the highest and most vital import with his unquestionable earnestness and sincerity, if he could but learn from such accidents how first of all to interest!

To-day the lesson is easy to learn. It is his patron Jehoshaphat Williams who is dying, and for whom he is about to supplicate the Divine succour and comfort. The same subject is touched upon in his sermon, which he fondly thinks of from time to time even while conducting the service. It is the unforgiven wife, Mrs. Jehoshaphat, and the neglected, perhaps also unforgiven, brother, Griffith Williams, who will listen to him ; to say nothing of the two or three colliers he perceives among the congregation as representative of the hundreds outside, whose daily bread depends upon the works Jehoshaphat Williams has so long and so successfully carried on.

The curate catches a glimpse too, after a little time, of a form he had never again expected to see in that place. Yes, it is he, Israel Mort the Overman, who stands half concealing himself behind a pillar, as if ashamed of his many years' absence.

The sight of him stirs the curate's blood.

The two men in former days have discussed religious topics, unwillingly on the part of Israel, condescendingly on the part of the curate, till he

found the collier's bluntness of logic and speech, and his resolute observance of the Christian rule to be no respecter of persons, so unpleasant, that he withdrew in a very dignified manner from the controversy; and did not even seem to hear the parting shot Israel sent after him, of

‘Well, parson, whenever thee likest to have another tussle I’m thy man!’

It is wonderful what life and vivacity a little personal resentment puts into the souls of the best of us under certain circumstances. All the neglected counsel and ministration of so many years, all the known hardness of Israel's character—plainly due to his wanton neglect of Christian brotherhood—all the contributions, individually trifling, but noticeable through their growth in the lapse of time—that Israel should have paid there with a glad heart, remembering the curate's constant text, ‘For God loveth a cheerful giver’—all these things seemed to grow in the curate's imagination mountains high. When he also recollected that the unseemly words referred to were spoken immediately after Mort's last visit to the church—the last visit, indeed, he had been known

to pay to any place of worship—these things roused the curate. He felt as though the hour had indeed come for another ‘tussle,’ but not of the vulgar kind speculated on by Israel Mort.

No, this day must be a great one for him, but for very different reasons. Let Israel Mort sink back for the present into his natural insignificance.

Did he draw courage from the signs of apparent fear exhibited by Israel in going behind the pillar?

If so, it does not much benefit him; for Israel, watching his opportunity, of the general rising for the hymn, emerges from his place of shelter, and takes a seat near to, and straight in front of, the reading-desk.

No wonder the curate’s cheek mantles at the hardened sinner’s audacity. But he is master of the position, and rather exults in the idea of making this man, even he, a witness of his ‘coming triumph.’

He is too much engrossed by his own fancies to perceive the true cause of Israel’s change of place. The Overman wanted, while seeming decorously to look towards the minister, to watch the pew

where sat one who would, in all probability, become the future owner of the mine, Mr. Griffith Williams, with his family; who were, apart from Mrs. Jehoshaphat, the only known relatives of the dying man.

How it is no one exactly knows, but whatever the curate says or does, seems to undergo to-day a kind of subdued unctuous change. His voice, manner, gestures, the very look of his face, grow in fervour and in authority; and a corresponding glow and acceptance kindles sympathetically in the hearts of those who listen.

Jehoshaphat Williams has been by no means a model man in any of the relations of life; but, on the contrary, notable through the neighbourhood as an unkind husband, a negligent brother, a hard master, and a reckless speculator with the lives of the people in his general system of management.

But who can remember these things now? Or, if they must be remembered, who can help seeing them in new and more kindly lights, when they recall Jehoshaphat's benefactions to the church, school and village; when they see his relatives come here to-day, full, no doubt, of pity

and forgiveness ; and when, above all, they picture him as dying in his dreadful solitude, turning now his wistful gaze upwards towards heaven, and now towards them, and to their minister, his constant friend, asking all to pray for him in that holy place where he may never again be able to rejoin them ?

The congregation is therefore in an admirable state of mind to respond to the fervent supplications of the curate for the recovery of their common benefactor, and, at the close low ejaculations burst from many lips of ‘ Amen ! ’ ‘ Amen ! ’

Scarcely had the sounds died away when the door opened, and a boy appeared on the threshold relieved against the bright March sunshine and the green and lovely tresses of a willow outside waving to and fro.

He looked flushed, and yet with a kind of boyish confidence in his face. Nor did he seem troubled by the fact of his coming in so late.

No one would have cared to notice the occurrence at another time, but now all eyes converged upon him, as if instinctively divining the news he brought.

The lad stole timidly and hesitatingly along,

looking first one side then the other, in search of some person whom he could not find, and colouring violently as he became conscious of the universal attention directed to his proceedings.

Israel was just then engrossed by thinking over a look given him by Mr. Griffith Williams, which he had again and again vainly sought till now, and which seemed almost to say, 'Let us meet after the service.'

The Overman had not, therefore, noticed the entrance of the new comer. Suddenly he became aware of the general movement of curiosity, and turned to see what all the people were looking at.

He saw his son David, and at once, in perfect calmness, beckoned to him to come to where he was.

'What is it?' asked Israel in a whisper, and bending low his head.

'He is dead, father.'

'Did you see him?'

'Yes, father.'

'Sit down.'

David obeyed, and Israel, after a moment of

intense pause and hush, rose to his feet as if actually intending to make the news public.

Fortunately for the decorum of the place, the curate was at the time retiring to the vestry, to put on his gown for the delivery of the sermon.

Israel sat down. Remembering then the cause of the curate's absence, in spite of the many years that had elapsed since he had been accustomed to these details of the service, he rose, and immediately left the church, and went round to the place where the minister was, who stared and frowned at the intrusion.

'Reverend sir,' began Israel, in a hushed and apologetic tone of voice; 'I beg pardon for the interruption, but I think you ought to know that Mr. Jehoshaphat Williams is dead. My son David has seen him.'

The curate took up the word: 'Dead! Mr. Mort? Well, God's will be done and not man's will. The answer to our prayers has been given and is not to be gainsaid. Accept my thanks for this timely intimation. It may be of service as regards my discourse to-day.'

‘Just what I thought, reverend sir,’ answered Israel.

‘Please to return to your place, Mr. Mort, and let the fact be known with as little disturbance as possible that death is in the house of Jehoshaphat Williams.’

Israel lost not a moment in obeying the curate’s commands, and in consequence there was quite a buzz in the church when the gowned minister re-entered.

The curate has often since then confessed to his intimates—in those confidential moments when the dearest secrets of life are allowed just to appear, be gazed on, and withdrawn perhaps for ever—that it is still a source of wonder to him how he became suddenly inspired to throw aside the greater part of his sermon, that had cost him so many painful hours of anxious labour, and trust himself with only occasional assistance from his MS. to launch out on the unknown sea of extemporaneous delivery. But he did so resolve; and surely he ought to be thankful for it, for it was to be the one success of a lifetime, a comfort

to him in all future years, when grown diffident—very diffident—as to the many other successes that were to have followed.

He ascended the pulpit. He felt at once bold, and yet full of fear; clear in his determination of what he was about to do, but feeling himself tremble nervously, whenever he gave even the most casual glance aside, at the idea of possible consequences.

Mort's hard, almost ironical, glance met his own as he raised his head from silent prayer and prepared to begin.

Was the Overman supposing that he had given some hint as to the sermon, and waiting to see how the curate meant to carry it out?

The fact disturbed him; and he did not begin as he had half intended, by putting aside his written sermon. On the contrary, he placed it before him as usual, and looked at it lovingly, most lovingly, as if he saw there reflected, as in a glass, all the noble and sweet and pious images that had filled his brain during the act of composition.

Perhaps he needed that bit of help from the old routine to see him fairly going on his new adventure.

And then the sight of the manuscript suggested the value of the first paragraph, which he always learned by heart, so that he might be sure of beginning well.

But if he used it ever so little, might he not be drawn away from his purpose, and so lose this solemn, this grand opportunity?

And then, while seeming only to be clearing his throat, he tossed for a moment or two in an agony of doubt and hesitation between what he might lose of his wealth in actual possession, and his hope of newer and more precious wealth to be obtained by going boldly to seek it.

Compelled to act, yet unable to choose, he resolved to make a sudden dash at something, if only to put an end to the awful stillness that prevailed around him, and which seemed to enter into and chill his very marrow with apprehension of a break-down.

He began by murmuring in an almost inaudible voice a sentence or two. Then light broke

upon him and he began again, and more successfully.

Till the news of this awful event to their dear departed brother in Christ had reached him (he said), he had intended to direct their attention to such and such points—which he began to enumerate with most unlucky facility, so that he not only got out the first or opening paragraph of his written sermon, but before he well knew what he was doing, found himself far on into the second, and was going, for aught he could tell, right through to the end.

The absurdity of the business was overwhelming. He paused and shut up his manuscript, and stood face to face with the unknown depths of his oratory.

What happened for the next minute or two he does not know, and has taken care never to inquire, but the dread void was crossed at last, and then in yet one other minute he seemed to have entered on a new life—in a new world.

A new life? Nay, a double life; for he found himself at one and the same time speaking with irresistible eloquence, while also listening with

delight to the orator ; chastened, however, with awe, as wondering how long it might last.

He reviewed the deceased gentleman's history. He showed how he had begun life as a collier boy at seven years of age, earning five shillings a week, probably scorning to be a burden to his poor parents.

Here he was broken in upon by a couple of sharp, decisive coughs, and sounding so like 'Hear, hear,' that he could not but glance towards their source.

It was Israel Mort ! Delicious to the curate's heart was this first testimony of success. Israel Mort of all men was moved ! Israel, however, was thinking not of the curate but of David, his son, whom he had ordered to be here to-day, after the usual call to inquire about Mr. Jehoshaphat's state, expressly that he might benefit by the curate's praise of Israel's grand ideal man—this Jehoshaphat ; and so begin at once humbly to imitate him as Israel himself did.

The Overman's eyes were fixed sternly on David's countenance at this critical period of the sermon ; but the lad turned away sadly, gloomily ;

and gazed half in fear, half in hope, on the curate, as if not only he, but all the little world about them both, knew that to-morrow his father meant to compel him to work in the mine, and cease scholarship and play, unless the minister would help him.

The interruption acted on the minister's oratory as the weir outside acted on the little river—made it flow on more cheerily, vigorously, brightly.

Ah, this was life, he felt; this was reality! The orator, now as ever, in moving himself moved his auditory. Delicious moments! His face was a study—so full of natural truth and innocent hypocrisy. It was cold in colour, and sad and troubled in outward expression—as befitted the words he had to speak; while his soul all the while revelled in the heat and glow and grand movement beneath—a sort of gulf-stream passing below colder and stormier seas. Surely Jehoshaphat Williams himself might have been more content to die than he was could he but have known how, before his form was cold, the curate would speak of him; and, knowing nothing of Jehosha-

phat's very natural doubts about himself, fix his place, at once and for ever, alike on earth and in heaven.

‘As a boy passing from one humble position to another’—here Israel gave David another of his significant looks, and the curate another of his equally significant coughs, to the good man's great solace; who began to think the devil really was not so bad as he was painted—‘As a boy,’ said the curate, repeating his words, ‘passing from one humble position to another, but always ascending a little; then hewing away at the coal, while gathering the strength to hew out fortune; then appointed a deputy—that is to say, to the first step in the government of his fellow-colliers; then in a very few months rising to the full dignity of Overman.’

And there the curate turned full towards Israel, as if to make an illustration of him; while Israel repaid the compliment by directing David's attention to the minister with a look that plainly said: ‘Mark that, boy. Listen to the parson.’

The curate went on with increased animation:—

‘Pausing not in the capacity of Overman, any

longer than sufficed to give him habits of command and larger practical knowledge, Jehoshaphat Williams obtained at last the onerous and honourable and profitable post of under-viewer; and then all other steps were easy: agent or manager, part owner, sole owner, till his climax—his hour of apotheosis—as Member of the great British Parliament of his country.

‘Here was another and signal example of the men who, self-made, became heroic captains of industry, giant pillars of our illustrious Temple of State.

‘Doubtless there were spots even in Jehoshaphat’s sun. He was human and must err; but, then, how else could God exercise his divine prerogative and forgive?’

He was reminded, too, ‘that there had been sad accidents in past times. But mining was an empirical art, science only beginning to speak so that she could be listened to authoritatively.’

And so the curate reached his peroration—a glowing one (taken from the manuscript, and conned by rote beforehand)—upon the deceased gentleman’s charities; and finally wound up

by asking himself why he repeated all these things.

He would tell them. He wanted to recall to their recollection the epitaph upon another great man in a metropolitan cathedral. He wanted to advise them, especially the young (here a kindly glance at David), to take the meaning of that epitaph to heart ; so that when strangers might come from afar on pilgrimage to the great man's grave in the churchyard outside these walls, and ask what had been the doings of him whom they so mourned, they might reply to them in a phrase which he translated for their benefit : ' Look around ! '

There were many moist eyes and handkerchiefs that afternoon in the little church. The curate's own eyes were still red when he emerged from the vestry into the churchyard with unusual celerity ; and where to his palpable surprise everybody waited to see him pass, the humbler members content to gaze and admire, while the more important shook hands with him and offered their congratulations.

One man only of the humbler class waited and watched for an opportunity to speak to the minister, and he was just that man whom the curate before his sermon would have supposed the very last to wish to speak to him. Israel Mort went boldly up, and held out his hand, which the curate grasped warmly, as he listened to the Overman's words :—

‘ Reverend sir, I haven’t been much in the way of sermons for a many years, but I want to thank you for yours, which has done me good. Some day I think you’ll find out how without my telling. It’s an old proverb—“ Don’t cry before you’re out of the wood,” but I’d like to put another by the side o’ that one—“ Don’t cry before going into the wood.” Do you take me, reverend sir ? ’

‘ Why—ah ! not exactly, Mr. Mort. ’

‘ Don’t blow a trumpet to tell all the world of the great things you’re a-going to do. ’

‘ Ah, yes—exactly, very good ! ’ responded the curate with a dubious smile, wondering whether the remark was intended for his or for the speaker’s own particular use.

‘ And David, sir, my boy, has also learned a

deal to day—or I'm much mistaken. Look up, lad, in the parson's face, and tell his reverence you mean to be a man some day.'

'Why not?' said the curate with a smile, while taking the boy's trembling fingers in his own, and noticing the wistful look in the lad's eye. 'Why not? Jehoshaphat Williams did these things—why not you?'

David could not speak. A tear was trembling within his lids, but he turned away to hide it from the curate's possible questioning, and from his father's certain anger.

'Come, David,' said the Overman, 'his reverence understands that you take kindly to the valuable hints he has given you. Mind, lad, that it doesn't want repeating. There may be too much of a good thing. I wish your reverence good afternoon.'

There was no emotion in the Overman's face. His eyes were as dry as his manners; and the tone and speech, though it seemed respectful—nay, grateful—rather puzzled the curate.

He looked after the retreating forms of Israel and David, and saw the former presently meet Mr. Griffith Williams; and he heard the loud

bluff voice of that gentleman telling the Overman to give him a call to-morrow at the farm.

Just for one moment the curate wondered indignantly what could be in Israel's mind to make him so obviously seek an appointment to-day, and to make it *there* of all places in the world! In those sacred precincts! Was he ambitious?—he, the hard drudge who had never yet been known to have a single aspiration beyond that of his present post?

But the curate forgot these thoughts in reverting to Israel's opinion of him, as shown by his attentiveness during the sermon, and his words since, which still puzzled him.

He was destined to be much more puzzled before night closed. He could not keep at home. And when out he could not keep in the solitary ways where he usually walked. He yearned to know what the world was saying about him—for his village *was* a world just then.

It was not, of course, that he wanted to be praised, or even to know, that men were praising him; no, indeed, no! But he was eager to learn if they appreciated the truths of his discourse. A

preacher, like an orator, must study, not only what he says, but how it affects those to whom he has spoken.

These thoughts led him, as the darkness of the evening grew, to pace along the banks of the little river, where, having reached the plain, it glides slowly between the colliers' cottages and the marsh on its way to the sea. Occasionally he would sit down on a piece of projecting rock under the high bushes, and again revel in the delight of the many fine things he was able to recall from the half impromptu sermon.

He was thus engaged when voices and advancing footsteps interrupted him. Two men and a boy became dimly visible as they emerged through the darkness, and approached the spot where he was reclining. Then they stopped as if about to separate.

He recognised the speakers as the village surgeon, Dr. Jolliffe, and Israel Mort.

They did not notice him, and he was glad, for he wanted to hear if they spoke about the sermon.

And this was what he heard :—

‘Certainly a most able man,’ observed the Doctor.

‘And a wonderful memory,’ responded Israel. ‘He would recognise anyone he had once talked to, aye, even twenty years after. I’ve known him do it.’

‘I don’t know much about his remembrances of friends, Mr. Mort, but he certainly never forgot an enemy.’

‘Ah!’ said the Overman, ‘a wise man! a truly wise man. He knew the world, Doctor.’

‘Do you know I never saw a man’s face and manners so unlike himself. The face round, innocent, chubby, I was going to say cherubinal—but at all events, if you couldn’t mistake him in that direction, you might easily suppose he was a jolly, good-tempered, prosperous farmer, with more live stock on his farm than ideas in his brain. Then, as to his manners, they were not merely agreeable, but there was this oddity about them, they were always the most agreeable and winning when saying or doing things that other people found particularly disagreeable.’

‘Was it known, Doctor, at the last, who would get the mine?’

‘Well, I know—and I suppose there can be no harm in telling you who have served him so long. He told me. And that was about the last communication he made to anybody in the world, for he died a few minutes after. He was obliged to choose between his wife and his brother, so Griffith Williams is in luck.’

‘Griffith Williams! I thought so. I was right then in my forecast. But, Doctor, did he say nothing about his wife—no share, or ——’

‘No,’ said the Doctor shortly.

‘Well, a great man has passed away. We ought to make much of him even now.’

‘You admire him, Israel! Why I thought you expected much from him, and got nothing beyond your bare hard-earned wages?’

‘I knew him all along, and knew that he knew me. So I wasn’t so much disappointed after all. There’ll be a grand funeral, I suppose?’

‘I expect so,’ assented the Doctor. ‘People collecting from all quarters, no doubt, to do him honour.’

‘Can he make much out of that, Doctor, in his grave in the churchyard yonder?’

‘Can’t say, I’m sure. Hark’ye, Israel, nobody knows better than you that all is not gold that glitters. If I were to tell you my candid opinion, I should say he would have a larger, grander, and altogether more appropriate funeral if the ghosts of all the people who have lost their lives prematurely under him were to come out of their graves and follow.’

‘I’d like to see that, too!’

‘Would you? You’re a bold man, Israel, to say so. But since you do say it, I believe you really would stand quietly by, and watch the whole grisly procession pass.’

‘Ay, but Doctor, I’d care most to see how Mr. Jehoshaphat looked at them—how he reviewed his troops!’

‘Ah well, good night! By the bye, does David really go to the mine to-morrow?’

‘Well, if he doesn’t he’ll have to give uncommon good reasons why.’

‘Good night, Mr. Mort.’

‘I’m going your way, Doctor. Come David.’

The curate watched their retreating forms with feelings that it would be difficult to do justice to.

This, then, was the true Jehoshaphat Williams, was it? This the hero he had so glowingly described!

Oh!—they were unjust—mistaken—prejudiced!

And yet he felt in his secret soul they spoke the truth—could have had no motive to do otherwise.

He felt sick with shame and humiliation. What! he of all men to have prostituted his priestly office, just when he dreamed he was fulfilling in all sincerity its legitimate demands!

He bent down his head into his hands and wept bitter, bitter tears.

How should he ever face the congregation again—if they knew of these things.

The curate was a good man. He had intended no wrong—no varnishing over of evil things. Somehow he had not only seen for the moment the things the world generally sees in a successful man, but he had also seen them under the kind of halo that sorrow will at times cast round such

persons—and that fact at once excused and condemned him in his own eyes.

After hours of sadness he went home, and spent the entire night wakefully in his bed, comparing the Doctor's speech with his own sermon, and with all the fine things he had said in it; striving piteously to see if they could in any way be reconciled, by the aid of a little Christian charity, in the interpretation of both.

CHAPTER IV.

PEKIN.

AFTER so painfully and so unconsciously enlightening the curate as to the value of his eulogy on the deceased Mr. Jehoshaphat, Israel and the Doctor separated, on reaching the plank bridge that crosses the stream.

From thence to Pekin may seem a long distance, but Israel did not find it so, as he and his lad plodded their way thither through the village and entered a picturesque winding lane. This soon began to ascend towards an exceedingly long row of colliers' houses, that stood on a conspicuous height far above all the other rows, and above all the single houses scattered on the mountain slope; and commanded attention from every passing traveller by the grandeur of the position, and the bare homeliness of the dwellings.

The row had been built by Jehoshaphat Williams many years before, and named by him in one of his more grotesque moods—when, possibly, he thought he was playing the poet or the artist in associating his row of cottages, rented at a shilling or so a week, with the beauty and splendour of the great Chinese capital.

As they reached the ground in front of the cottages, and passed along the row of dimly-lighted windows, Israel stopped to speak with a collier, who was sitting on a doorstep, smoking, and looked—so David thought—as if he had been on the watch for the Overman. He rose to meet Israel, and they stood a little apart, speaking in low tones; but presently Israel spoke loud enough to let the boy know they spoke of Mr. Barrett, the manager of the mine under Mr. Jehoshaphat, and who was therefore Israel's immediate superior.

‘I can tell ye, he has seen old Mrs. Jehoshaphat; and what's more, that he has been hanging about the farm, trying to see Mr. Griffith Williams,’ said the collier, with a mysterious air.

‘Ay, ay!’ replied Israel, with a sardonic smile,

whichever on 'em gets the mine, he'll be right, he thinks.'

'But to be trying it on so soon, the old man just dead!' added the collier.

'Barrett takes time by the forelock. He doesn't mean to lose a comfortable berth, not if he can help it,' said Israel. 'All right! I should do the same were I in his place.'

'And that's where you ought to be, master Israel, if everybody had their rights. You ought to be in his place.'

'Ah, thou always wast a dreamer, Lewis; I ain't time for such intellectuol recreations.'

Obedying a hint, however, from Lewis, Israel moved nearer to him and away from David, and then they again conversed in undertones, while Lewis looked more than once curiously at the boy.

A sudden sense of alarm ran through David's breast. This man Lewis was in the habit of making extra earnings by teaching raw lads to cut coal, and had the character of being a cruel taskmaster.

David never stopped to think that he was not yet old enough for that kind of work. He

thought only he was going to be put under Lewis—that they were arranging it now—and thus to all his former horror of the mine there was now a deeper tinge added!

Israel, happening to look round, noticed the lad's stricken look, for the light of a candle, stuck just inside a window, fell full upon him; but he did not trouble himself to enquire into the cause.

'Go home,' he said to David, 'I will follow presently.' He then went with Lewis into the latter's place.

David rushed on—right into his own home, and to his mother, who had long waited for him, and yearned to see and speak to him alone, and now found her opportunity as she thought.

But David gave her no time. His face was wild with excitement and affright.

'Mother, he is talking to Lewis—it is about me—I am sure of it. He will bind me to him—and he will kill me!

'Oh mother, mother, don't let me go down. Don't! don't! Let me do anything, anything in the world, but that!'

'But David, dear! Now listen—calm yourself;

do my darling boy, my child—will you not listen to me?’

‘Oh yes, mother ; but do say you will not let me go down to-morrow morning. Mother, you must speak now. I can’t go into the mine. I won’t. It would kill me. I can’t sleep at nights for it. And when I do, I jump up all at once out of the most horrid dreams. Last night I saw that boy who was lost only a few months ago in our mine for eight days, and found dead. He came to me, and whispered such things to me of how it had happened, and what he had seen ! And when I awoke I do believe I heard my own voice screaming in fright.’

She noticed his hand was trembling, his eyes dilated and wild, his voice strange, unreal.

To quiet him, rather than with the faith that she could do any good, or even fulfil her promise, she said—

‘David, dear, I will—I will indeed ! But be patient. I have found that always best with him.’

‘Mother, I can’t be patient if he makes me go *there* !’ He seemed to thrill and shudder as he

uttered the word 'there.' It included for him all that man could devise of things most cruel and most disgusting.

'But did you not say you would? Did you not promise him you would go down?'

David turned his head, and laid it against her breast, moaning with pain. He had utterly forgotten in his new fright the promise that had been exacted.

The door opened, and Israel came in.

David and his mother hastily separated, the former sitting down on a low stool, while the latter got ready the supper.

'You have heard the news of Mr. Jehoshaphat's death?' Israel said to his wife, after a pause.

'Yes,' Mrs. Mort replied. 'How will it affect you?'

'Fools can put questions that it takes wise men to answer, and are sometimes too much even for them. But, wife, I'll tell you. I've been pondering over that same question ever since I heard last night how bad he was. And it's on account of that I've been to church.'

‘To church!’ interrupted Mrs. Mort, caught for once in an expression of surprise.

‘To church!’ he repeated doggedly. ‘Have you anything to say to that?’

‘No, Israel; except that I am glad.’

‘What do you mean by that? Do you mean to insinuate—— but there, if you did, it wouldn’t matter. Only don’t interrupt me again. I think slow. You put me out.’

‘I am sorry,’ again interposed unlucky Mrs. Mort.

Israel’s brow coloured with ire. He no longer cared to go further with his wife into the new hopes that had been excited in him. And as he had long lost the relish of the one bit of occasional pleasure his married life at first gave him, the power of obtaining a patient and respectful listener whenever he wanted for his own ease of mind to talk himself out—he merely remarked:—

‘Come David, lad, eat! Get on wi’ thy supper!’

But the lad pushed his plate away, and said he wasn’t hungry—he couldn’t eat.

‘That’s nonsense,’ said Israel. ‘I’ve told thee before that those who do work, or mean to work, must eat. Eat thy victuals, and make no more ado.’

The lad’s face flushed, and he seemed as if he were about again to refuse; but he caught the pleading look of his mother’s face, and did eat enough to satisfy the stern, inquisitive eye, so long as it thought it necessary to remain fixed on him.

‘And now, wife, about David. Have you made the lad understand about to-morrow? That I don’t want to take a snivelling girl in boy’s clothes with me; nor an idiotic coward, who sees a ghost lurking behind every corner. You know, and he knows, that my mind is made up. Is he man enough to keep his promise, and do his duty?’

‘Give him time, he’s——’

‘Oh, I’ll give him till to-morrow morning, half-past five o’clock, certainly. That’ll do, David?’

‘And is he to go under Lewis?’ asked Mrs. Mort, tremblingly, but struggling to seem calm and self-possessed.

‘Lewis! Is the woman mad? Lewis! Certainly not!’ said the Overman, with a touch of scorn.

‘Israel—husband—we have had but three children; two are gone, and this one alone remains. If not for my sake, or for his, then for your own, be patient with him, listen to him and what he wants. He says he can work; he will work! Sometimes, husband, the poor silly lad talks of how he will yet grow to be a great man if only——’

‘That’s just what I want to put him in the way of. Do you suppose I mean to remain Overman all my life long, or that I mean my only son—heir to all I haven’t got, but mean to get—to remain where I shall first put him? No. And since I am in the mood to speak, you shall hear my mind, and think of it afterwards, when you see how things shall be shaped.

‘I want David to earn money because we are so wretchedly poor, and I can’t any longer do without. That’s one thing.

‘Next, it don’t suit me just now, or for some time to come, to look ambitious, and therefore I

choose to let everybody see my boy begin as I began, as all colliers begin, at the bottom. That's another thing.

‘And now for the last thing. And if either of you dare to breathe a syllable of what I am about to say, I'll—well, I don't need to threaten. You both know me, so listen. I've been studying mines and mining to some purpose all these years, and now, if I don't miscalculate, my time's come. And if so, it won't be long before David's time will come. He must get prepared then, as I have got, by hard work, and by never minding whether it's dirty work or ugly work. The gold'll be bright that'll come out of it all, and then David and I will see, wife, if things can't be made a bit more comfortable at home.’

Mrs. Mort's face happened to be turned away, so that he could not see it. But whether he had got to like the sound of his voice, or that the flavour of the ideal fruit he saw growing and glowing in the distance for his hands to pluck somehow humanized him a little, he said a few words more in the same strain, hardly thinking or caring, as he did so, how it might affect his listener. But

suddenly he heard a kind of gurgling sound in the throat, then a cry from David, and the next instant she was on the floor, fainting; the boy wild with alarm, and crying and sobbing to her—

‘Mother! mother! mother!’

Such a thing Israel was bound to confess to himself had not happened before for many years; so, after he and David had brought her round and quieted her, he gave her, in the shape of a warning as to the future, his full forgiveness, and kissed her.

Poor David soon saw there was no more hope for him of escape from the threatened doom; so, taking heart from the thought Israel had so skilfully suggested to him without seeming to do so, that he, boy as he was, might yet come to his mother’s aid, he spoke out right bravely—

‘Father, I will go to the mine in the morning when you call me.’

It was sufficient. Israel held out his hand; the lad came to it, took it, was lifted on to the father’s knee, and in the enjoyment of so novel a position forgot all he had been so determined upon a little while ago.

When David was about to go to bed, his father said to him quite unexpectedly—

‘I am well pleased with thee, lad. And I’m half inclined to give thee another day. The spring flowers are just coming out. I saw some children getting primroses and violets yesterday up by the Nine Bells level. So if you like, the motto shall be, “Play to-morrow, and work the day after.” It’ll be your last chance for a goodish while, lad.’

‘No, father,’ said David, in a grateful yet very hurried voice, as, conscious if he did not say ‘No’ quickly, he might not say it at all. ‘No, father; if I am to go, I’d like to feel I’d done it. Thank you all the same.’

‘And that’s manly, too. But if you don’t want a day for your own sake, I think you’d better take one for mine. I shouldn’t like to leave you long alone in the pit the first day, and I must go up to Griffith Williams early in the morning.’

David had heard enough. The words ‘leave you alone in the pit’ made him quite as anxious as his father could be that the dreaded event should be postponed to Tuesday.

As they parted for the night, Israel saw an odd

expression on his son's face that annoyed him, it seemed so plainly to say, 'Was my father trying to deceive me when he seemed so stern and determined about my going down to-morrow, and then when he talked about giving me a day's play for my own sake, so that I mightn't go down till Tuesday after all?' And Israel saw dimly glimpses of something never even thought of before in connection with aught belonging to him—glimpses of that new and wondrous world, a boy's mind in the first great era of development.

'Wife,' said Israel, when the two were alone, 'go to bed. I mean to work for some hours—perhaps all night. Don't disturb me.'

She went away in silent submission; and if she wondered what he was about to do, took care to give him no indication as to her thoughts, either by word, look, or gesture.

He immediately cleared the table. Then he fetched an old portmanteau, out of which he took rolls of paper, pencils, pens, inks of different colours, red, black, and blue, a pair of compasses, a parallel ruler, and a variety of other things, the uses of which might not be very clear to a by-

stander, but which Israel perfectly understood the value of.

Then unrolling and spreading out on the table one of the bulkiest of the documents—a plan of some kind—he began to work upon it; his object being to transfer to its surface certain memoranda from his black, greasy note-book, the laborious work of his leisure and stolen hours during many years.

He went on thus, hour after hour, as patiently as an automaton might do, constructed for the purpose by some wondrous freak of science.

About daybreak his wife, who had not been able to sleep even for a single minute, could no longer resist the womanly impulse to go in, and look upon him, and see if he was warm, his fire burning, and whether she might not make him a cup of tea.

But when she had hastily dressed for this purpose, and got to the outside of his door, her heart failed her, remembering how often such impulses had ended in fresh bitterness of soul.

What might she not discover him doing that he did not wish anybody to know? Nothing

could irritate him more than that would. She would go back to bed.

And she did move away, but again returned. All the years of unhappiness she had passed with him seemed to glide away from her and be as if they had never been, when she remembered the kindly words of the last evening, and dwelt on the possible future to which they might lead, if she used them now with good sense and patient love.

She went in. Israel stared at her for a moment, whether in wonder or in sternness she could not tell ; but then went on with the work in hand, which was at that moment very interesting to him, and which he desired greatly to finish before stirring from his chair.

Timid, irresolute, she knew not how to speak ; so stirred his fire very quietly, and then slid out of the room.

In a few minutes she returned with a steaming and fragrant cup of tea, which she placed near him, on the one vacant spot of the table, and again went away.

He took it up, almost mechanically, and as if it were the most natural kind of thing to happen, and drank it down as rapidly as the heat would allow, and then again was absorbed in the work, when Mrs. Mort re-entered, and took away the cup, intending to refill it. That made the great man speak :—

‘No more, Molly! I am quite refreshed.’

‘Are you? I am so glad, Israel,’ said poor Mrs. Mort, terrified to death lest she should show her gladness too demonstratively.

‘Molly, lass, I meant what I said last night. Come here. Give me a kiss on the strength of my promise to think a little more about thee when I get time.’

She came, but could no longer restrain herself from laying her head on his shoulder, and clasping him within her loving arms and against that panting, sobbing, half-stifled breast, while she murmured—

‘Oh, dear, dear husband. I don’t think I shall live a many years, so be kind to me, kind I mean as you can.’

‘Well, that’s a reasonable request, and I’ll do what you ask. Do you know what I am at here all this night?’

‘No.’

‘Ah well, wait and you’ll see. Go back to bed, and get some sleep, and mind David. Fortify him for to-morrow.’

‘You have quite made up your mind about him?’

‘Quite!’

There was a half sigh, and that was all, as Mrs. Mort accepted her son’s fate, unconscious how much more, just then, she thought over and felt the seeming amelioration of her own.

Israel did not finish his labours till just the hour he had fixed on for his visit to Mr. Griffith Williams, and which was the very earliest that decency permitted.

He stood up and stretched himself to his full height, and yawned as if the relief other men get by a series of efforts, he was accustomed to take at once and have done with it. He then knelt down and dipped his bullet-head into a pail of water, rose alert, fresh, and ready for the day’s

work, which he felt instinctively must be momentous.

When he had cleaned himself and put on his best clothes, and was ready to start, he took up the plan on which he had been working for so many hours, and which he had left till then to get thoroughly dry, rolled it tightly up, and held it in his hand with the air of a man who feels an unwonted treasure in his grasp. He felt something akin perhaps to what the young officer feels when his first sword is put into his hand, or the emotion may be likened to that which the field-marshal experiences when he knows the bâton to be his own at last, by the best of evidences, the exulting clutch of the wand by the eager fingers.

Some such thought must have struck Israel, for he stopped and mused to himself,—

‘ Now if I wanted to persuade a man who might either become a friend or an enemy that I was myself unarmed, and particularly innocent like, should I go and flourish a sabre in his face to begin with ? ’

Israel answered himself, as he so often answered others, by silence and action. He had already

restored to the portmanteau all the things he had taken out of it except the plan which he had so long laboured over ; now he put that back too, and set off without it to see Mr. Griffith Williams, expecting to steal a march upon Mr. Barrett, the agent, whose business hours, and habits, he well knew.

CHAPTER V.

COMING TO THE POINT.

LEFT an orphan to the care of his vigorous but very unsentimental brother Jehoshaphat, who was many years his senior, Griffith Williams had at first tried the hard labour of the pit, but given it up, to his brother's great offence, and become a farm-labourer.

And so he remained, till the brother's more fortunate career began to make the contrast unpleasant to the successful man, who then gave Griffith a small but sufficient income—helped him to his great desire, a thoroughly good education, and when that was attained, showed a sort of pride in his recognition of the clever, gentlemanly fellow he had, as he thought, at last created out of a great hulking ploughman.

What else he might have done for him never

came to the test ; happily, perhaps, for Griffith ; who married a farmer's daughter, a notable, bustling, domesticated woman, with good looks, an excellent temper, and a considerable fortune. Her father had concealed from her alike his power and his will to enrich her ; fearing she might otherwise become the victim of some marriageable bird of prey. He was pleased with her choice, and left them when he died 'The Farm,' and everything in the world he possessed.

Griffith was now a gentleman. He read much, travelled occasionally, spent money freely whenever appealed to in behalf of any good cause, and then, after all, began, at the age of forty, to find his life a burden, without knowing why.

His wife was an excellent woman, and he devotedly attached to her, in spite of her deficiencies in the character of a lady. His three children were of striking beauty, and revelling in good health ; what, then, was the secret cloud that ever veiled from him the true value of all his advantages ?

It was this : Griffith was at once sensitive and proud, and had discovered that others, in knowing

these traits of his character, took a malignant pleasure in making the worst use of them.

He had fallen, he found, between two stools. The gentry with whose tastes and means his own were most in accord took no notice of him, but seemed to think the poor farm-labourer of yesterday was essentially the same man still, only grown rich. The little farmers on their side, men of hard laborious life and unrefined habits, ever fighting against poverty, or the fear of it, looked upon him as an upstart, even while they were obliged to acknowledge he was no discredit to their order. At every local agricultural show and contest, Griffith and his labourers were always foremost in showing what good farming meant by practical examples, and by winning a large proportion of the prizes offered ; incidents that scarcely improved the temper of those whose inferiority they illustrated.

Thus baffled in his very natural aspirations, and resenting the injustice of his neighbours, he grew restless, solitary, reserved in his habits, took depressing views of things, became morbidly suspicious. And, to make matters worse, he

cultivated that troublesome thing, conscience, till it became, according to its custom, a power formidable to its owner, since he did not attempt to make it formidable in a more legitimate way, that is, in using it for the conquest of the many evils he saw about him.

There was one exception to this. He did once attempt to open Jehoshaphat's eyes to the condition of the children in his mine; and that gentleman made the interference so extremely unpleasant to the offender, that not only was the offence never repeated, but from that time the brothers ceased to hold any but the most formal and necessary communications with each other.

Thus Griffith's impulsive goodness and conscientiousness came to nothing, or very little; and at the same time he found men looked upon him, on the whole, as having a keen eye to his own advantage, and as ready to take deep offence against insults or injuries, real or supposed.

Such was Griffith Williams, the man who now owned the colliery, and who lives in the very loveliest neighbourhood, and the most picturesque

old manor house, perhaps, that could be found in half a dozen shires—'The Farm'—distinguishingly so called, in reference to its superior dignity to all the other and smaller farms of the neighbourhood.

The most striking feature of the range of mountains that here for so many miles face the sea is the undulations of their sky line. A mountain rises to a considerable height, with a rounded central crown; the slopes, right and left, forming valleys, which reascend to other and similarly-crowned mountains—thus valley and mountain succeed at near intervals, each after each; but with such infinite changes in the general form and direction of their intervening double slopes, and of their lovely and wild streams of water, that it is an unending pleasure to go from one to another, finding ever fresh beauty the further you go.

And what a world of sweet solitude awaits you if you go right up some of these valleys till you reach their highest points; what a world of picturesque splendour if you then also ascend the heights near, and gaze over the interminable

panorama of mountains and valleys, and the all-encircling sea!

On the very edge of one of these wild streams, and near the bottom of one of these exquisite valleys, Griffith's house and farm was situated.

All their beauty and grandeur, however, are non-existent for Israel, as he approaches the Farm through fields and by footpaths; but for all that he looks keenly around him, taking note of every object that may help him to understand better the habits and views of the owner.

He meets people hurrying past in unusual silence and gravity, but he knows them and asks no questions. One is an undertaker, another the sexton of the church, another a woman a dress-maker, all illustrating, to Israel's cynical mind, the notion what new life death puts into many people.

A high bank encircles the Farm on the side by which the Overman approaches, and not being deep in the mystery of the preservation of man-gold wurzel, he wonders what can be the meaning of the bulging slope stretching nearly to the top

of the bank, and why it is thatched so beautifully across the whole breadth of the field.

Above this bank is the hedge, then over that an oak-tree, now bare of foliage, through which we can see a mound, which admits only the top of the house to be visible, and which consequently prevents those inside the house from seeing the magnificent sweep of the sea, unless they go to the mound for the express purpose. Israel discovers this peculiarity; and it seems greatly to tickle his fancy.

He now reaches a wide gate, which he opens, and in an instant half a dozen dogs are in full bay, their voices resounding so as to charm a huntsman, but which are not at all agreeable to Israel, as he finds them closing in upon him, snuffing at his clothes, touching his calves, and seeming to be the more dangerous just as they become less noisy; a trait that Israel perfectly understands.

He waits, however, calm, watchful, immovable, his hand ready, his eye passing over their eyes, giving no sign of fear or hostility, though prepared to brain or to throttle in an instant, if he

had occasion, and behold! the dogs are presently at peace with him, and one of them even thrusts his cold nose into Israel's hands.

That business over, the Overman pauses in uncertainty as to the right way to go. He doesn't want to show himself at the principal front, which he can see a little way off, and he does want to slip in by the servants' entrance which he cannot find.

The noise of the dogs perhaps will bring somebody out, so he will wait a minute or two.

The Farm is pretty well all before him now. On his left, under arching oaks of the most picturesque character, are ducks diving and wing-shaking in the stream at the base of the great trees.

On his right runs the shrubbery, where over the evergreens are snowberries dancing gaily in the sun and wind.

A second, but smaller gate, with an exceedingly smooth path of the richest mahogany colour inside, seems to lead to the part of the house facing the mound. He tries the gate, but finds it locked.

He moves on, dubious as to whether he had not better go right up to the chief entrance ; and a few yards brings him within sight of the side of the house, which is long, has quaint windows half covered with ivy, and a high terrace-wall pierced with arches right through the immense thickness, immediately in its front.

Beyond this he sees another external gate, and a very handsome Tudor arch, showing the limits of the farm on that side.

Still no one comes, and still Israel is fain to look about him, and study a place so novel and just now so interesting to him for many reasons.

But his eye wanders listlessly over the long trough, that carries water rushing eagerly along at a level below his feet ; at the thatched shed raised on short squat pillars ; at the long low-roofed line of stables ; at the grand-looking massive steps that lead after all only to a loft ; at the low walls on either side reaching to his knee ; at the fresh series of odd-shaped places and buildings that become suddenly visible at a lower level ; at the quaint bell hanging just under the eaves which calls the labourers to and from meals

and work ; at the noisy cackling hens, and stately crowing cocks, that are pushing their beaks in everywhere, and mounting high upon everything ; when suddenly a light step is heard behind ; he turns and sees David.

The boy advances to meet him, and show the way ; laughingly, yet also a little excitedly ; and explaining that he had seen the squire (for so people began to call Mr. Griffith Williams) while he was seeking wild flowers, and that he asked him about his father, and was pleased to hear he was coming up to the Farm.

Israel looked at the lad so long and fixedly that David changed colour, and wondered if he was suspected of lying ; but his father's thoughts were far away, travelling slowly but firmly towards the promised land he had so long made the goal of his life.

‘ Do you know,’ at last he said, ‘ if Mr. Barrett, the manager, has been here ? ’

‘ Oh, yes sure ! He's in there now with Mr. Griffith Williams.’

‘ I meant to have been first. I ought to have been,’ Israel muttered to himself. ‘ Go on, David.’

David went on before him, through the long but narrow hall : the father seeing nothing of the pictures between which he passed, or of the busts over the doors, or of the painted glass window that admitted a dim, rich light from the conservatory, while his son not only saw all these, but much more (for which he must have been indebted to his fancy), if we may judge from his subsequent report to his mother of this, to him, wonderful day.

At the further end David felt obliged to point out to his father the noble stag-horns that were suspended over the door through which they were about to enter.

‘ He killed the stag, father, and saved the life of the huntsman,’ cried David, enthusiastically.

‘ He—who?’

‘ Mr. Griffith Williams, father.’

‘ Oh!’ responded Israel, and invited no further particulars ; so David, obliged to be silent, opened the door and went in first, as if already he felt at home, until he remembered this was his last holiday ; then he went out again.

The place dazzled the Overman. Spending the

greater part of all the daylight that life afforded him in the mine, the blaze of illumination that now burst upon his eyes 'dazed him,' as he said, when he got home again, and found somebody to speak to. The room seemed all window, and to bring the glowing valley, the dancing wild stream, the broad marsh, and the double and vying splendour of the sea and sky into startling closeness.

He found then the builder of the house had known what he was about, and had only left the view closed from one spot that it might not interfere with a still finer view from another.

Mr. Griffith Williams was a stout, handsome man, with light curling hair and beard. He wore a short brown velvet shooting-coat, and had a gun lying across his knee, as though he had been interrupted while examining it.

He sat at a large round table, on which were writing materials, and a big tin box, labelled outside 'Jehoshaphat Williams, Esquire.' This had evidently just come from the deceased gentleman's lawyers; and from it had been taken a number of papers and bulky documents by a person who

stood by as its custodian, and handed them as required by the heir.

‘Our firm, sir’—so the gentleman was saying as Israel was introduced, and sat down immediately in the most unobservable corner he could find—‘thought, as you are sole heir, and as some of these things may demand immediate attention, we ought not to wait for the customary occasion of handing everything over, but see you at once, and take your instructions.’

‘Quite right. Many thanks. You will, of course, continue to act for me as you did for my brother.’

The gentleman gave a most profound bow, breathed as if he lived again, and a heavy fear had been lifted from his mind.

Israel also drew a deep breath. The affair struck him as ominous and unpleasant. The same sort of dealing would renew Mr. Barrett’s lease of office; who, if he did not leave now, would probably stick to the colliery quite the natural term of Israel’s life.

He noticed, too, that Griffith Williams had seen him, and had not thought proper to notice him.

But where was the manager? He saw nothing of him. Had he already settled everything with Mr. Griffith Williams, and gone away home?

At that moment Mr. Barrett came into the room; and in a bustling, confident sort of way, implying the best possible understanding with his employer, went to him and the lawyer; and then, after exchanging a few words with the former, came across the room to where Israel was at its furthest extremity, and said to him—

‘Mr. Griffith Williams can’t see you to-day; but to-morrow, perhaps, he may spare a minute or two.’

‘Oh, very well!’ said Israel, rising, hat in hand.

‘Can I do what you want?’ asked the manager, not exactly in an offensive way, but looking, Israel thought, as if wondering at his impudence in coming there.

‘No, sir, thank you. My business isn’t so important but it can wait.’ And staying no further question, away he went, in the direction of his own home.

But not for long did he keep in that direction. When he had got so far from the Farm as to be sure no one from thence could distinguish his movements, he turned short round by a lane, re-entered the valley, but on the other side of the stream, and favoured by the thick undergrowth, was able to reach a spot within full sight of his employer's house, without himself incurring the risk of being seen.

He then sat down on the round trunk of a felled oak-tree, took out his watch, and made some calculations, then drew forth his pipe, and began to smoke slowly, meditatively.

'Well,' said he to himself, after a long pause, 'Barrett has got his chance—and he had best make use of it, for he shall never have another, not if ——'

He puffed again in silence and anxious thought.

'I'll stay here at any rate till he comes out again—ay, if it be night first. Make your mind easy on that point, Mr. Barrett!'

Half an hour passed—an hour—two hours—and still no Mr. Barrett appeared.

Israel, at his tree, felt something like the Indian

at the burning stake, but like him evinced no emotion.

The labours, and sacrifices, and hopes, and disappointments of long years were again being gone through, as he saw that each hour's delay of the agent with his employer made it more and more sure that the ground was being cut away from under his feet—that ground where he had proposed to stand a new man, and from which he had intended to start on a new career.

Still he puffed away with no perceptible emotion or impatience, beyond the occasional shifting of his legs, or the rise for a moment to one knee, to look out through the opening he had found among the bushes.

And even when he did see Barrett come out at last from his long audience, only those who might have noticed Israel's face dimly illuminated as by a light suddenly passed across it and gone would have perceived anything noticeable in the way he rose to his full height, and stood apparently considering, for a little space, which way he should go. In reality, he was measuring with exactness Mr. Barrett's retreating steps, so that

he might judge how long he would be passing out beyond the far gate ; and how soon Israel might start forth again, without risk of being seen by the agent, on his determined purpose to confront Mr. Griffith Williams in his house.

That time soon came. Israel descended the slope, leapt over the stream, and began to ascend the valley a little, preparatory to a descent upon the house, so as to evade all danger of a meeting with Mr. Barrett. And then, to Israel's great satisfaction, he and Mr. Griffith Williams met in the pathway leading past the Farm up towards the mountain height.

The greeting on the squire's side was genial, yet with a smack of condescension ; on Israel's it was deferential, but manly, almost stern.

'Shall we sit down here—pointing to a little knoll—or go into the house?' asked Griffith.

'All places are alike to me, sir,' responded Israel ; and, following his employer's example, he sat down. And as his lack-lustre eye (when unexcited) fell on the foliage and water of the beautiful valley, he really seemed to see no difference between it and his own familiar mine.

‘ Well now, Mort, what is it you want to say to me? Speak out, and straightforwardly, for— ’

‘ Did you ever know me to do anything else, sir?’ asked Israel, as if really curious to be answered, but with no show of anger.

‘ Well—no. But you are aware it is against all discipline for inferior officers to make complaints against superior ones.’

‘ Better that,’ said Israel, interrupting the speaker, ‘ than, for lack of complaining, to let inferior and superior be all blown up together.’

‘ Why, Israel, man! you do not, cannot, mean that things are so bad as that.’

‘ I mean, sir,’ said Israel, looking aside and down, not at all as in fear, but as if engaged in some mental effort, that required all possible abstraction from externals, ‘ that for a long time past the colliers have made the two deputies miserable by their continual alarms, now about one thing, now about another. I mean that the deputies have been trying in the same way to scare me, and I have felt obligated so far to listen to them as to call Mr. Barrett’s special attention to a number of things that want to be seen to,

and which he does see to by treating the mine as a tinker treats a tin-kettle with a worn-out bottom—by soft sawder. I mean, sir, that as none of us, therefore, can get satisfied without going to head-quarters—why, to head-quarters I come, as it's my duty to do. It's your property, you know, sir, but it's our lives at stake.'

The eyes of the two men met—Griffith's troubled with many thoughts, Israel's luminous with one thought; he was coming to the point at last.

'And are the necessary operations so very heavy?' asked the former.

'I want you, sir, to come to the mine and judge for yourself.'

'I! What's the good of that? I am no judge. I hate the mine. I mean the details.'

'You are owner,' said Israel, with something like reproof.

Griffith's eyes glanced enquiringly, but unconscious they were doing so, in Israel's, and then at his own dress, and then again at Israel's, but dropped them suddenly to the dog lying at his feet.

However slow might be the thoughts of the Overman, his instincts were keen and quick, and he at once guessed and tested the nature of his employer's speculations by saying—

‘If, sir, you will say you will come down, I will take care that everything shall be made as little disagreeable as possible.’

‘Tell me, Israel, candidly, is there any danger?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘You can guarantee that?’

‘With my life,’ said Israel with a smile—a most unusual phenomenon on his face—‘if that were any good to you.’

‘Don’t imagine me a coward, Israel.’

‘Certainly not, sir,’ responded Israel, passing his hand over his face at the same moment.

‘No, Israel, I don’t think I am a coward. I can hunt with a horse that most men would refuse to mount, and leap anything that can be leaped; I can bear pain; I could go into battle, and decently, at least, play my part. These things lie, or might lie in my way. But the mine!—well, Israel, you know as much of my history as most men, and know how I shrank from it in

youth, and I don't find my love grow for it in maturer age.'

'Ay, but for all that there's more to be got out of her now than as yet there ever has been gotten,' remarked Israel, patting the sward with his right hand, as if that were the mine below; and following the remark by such a glance at Griffith as the marksman gives who fires at some noble prey, and waits to see if it is about to fall.

'What's that you say?' hastily demanded Griffith. He had already risen to his feet, and turned his face towards home, but again turned, and stood rooted to the spot.

'Will you come to the mine to-morrow, sir?'

'Impossible! it would not be decent till after the funeral.'

'Well, sir, when shall we meet?'

'You and I to be alone?'

'Oh no; I think you should see the people, and they ought to see you.'

'And what about Mr. Barrett?'

'Of course he'll be there, sir.'

Griffith seemed more and more to be lost in the tangles of his own thoughts, or else in the dis-

turbed aspect that Israel's presence, looks, words, and behaviour seemed to cast over them. This reply puzzled him exceedingly.

Certainly he wanted to hear whatever Israel had to say, and he saw he must let him say it in his own time and manner. But he did also want not to seem mean or ungentlemanly to his manager, Barrett. He had been busily thinking how to compass both ends at the same time, when lo! Israel set at nought his forethought by saying, as if it were the simplest thing in the world, that of course the manager would be present.

After giving his employer ample time to realise the force of this remark, Israel said—

‘I will, by your leave, sir, call on him as I go home, and say I have asked you to meet him and me, and that you have consented to come.’

‘If so, he will be here presently, and either require the project to be given up so far as you are concerned, or resign.’

‘Or—resign!’ echoed Israel; but Griffith could not, for the life of him, tell whether the tone meant something of wonder, or a good deal of submission.

‘What should I do, then?’ asked Griffith, a little maliciously, as he surveyed the Overman.

‘I don’t think you will need to ask that question, sir, after our meeting.’

So said Israel Mort, and not a tone, look or gesture escaped him that could imply that he felt trapped like a fox in his wiles. His employer could, in fact, almost fancy the Overman’s mind was already far beyond the point where he (Griffiths) was pausing in speculation. It seemed to him that Israel was waiting impatiently for them to begin together some new undertaking, some grand commercial march, that might lead to wealth, such as the owner of the Farm and of the mine had never yet dared to think of.

He shook hands hastily with Israel, and then they separated.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST HOLIDAY.

AFTER leaving his father at the Farm, David knew not what to do with himself. The excitement of that visit had for the moment made him forget his overhanging trouble, but now it all returned upon him.

He no longer thought of the day as a holiday. Should he go home? No, he dared not trust himself to spend the time there. He felt that it was better his mother should not have his pale face before her, to strike fresh trouble into her eyes whenever they chanced to fall on it.

He wandered listlessly about, and his feet led him, as if by a will of their own, to the little wood he had passed through lately, so happy and confident in his strength and sense of safety and freedom.

He sat down on the root of a chestnut tree, which had a thousand little branches with silver tips glistening in the sun.

The birds sang in it, undisturbed by the mournful little form below—the sun shone very warmly, the wild flowers smelt pleasantly in the breeze, in fact all things in the wood went on—it seemed to David—with the old story of ‘Live and be happy!’—‘Live and be happy!’ like the flattery of a hypocritical friend, unaware that he has been found out. The boy lent a sullen ear to this old story, and turned a pale, sullen cheek to the breeze, as if he regarded its soft touch as the kiss of a Judas. In his suffering and unreasonable young heart, David felt most bitter and angry against all the sweet and tender influences which this little wood had had over him ; making him for so many years hope such peaceful and delightful things and ignore stern facts and probabilities.

Some way below him he saw a little girl gathering primroses that lit a narrow stream, before the sun had time to reach it. His eyes were just as gloomy as ever when they fell upon her, though he knew her well, and had for her all the

affection a brotherless and sisterless lad could have for his first friend. But he remembered now as he watched her, that that fatal belief in a charmed life, the hopes of being providentially spared the hardship that had come upon most of his schoolmates as childhood departed, had been greatly strengthened and encouraged by the companionship of this little flower-gatherer. So David looked at her with bitter eyes, for he could not help looking at her ; she was much too pretty a sight for him to keep his eyes away. Her tiny wandlike figure in her violet frock was the most graceful thing in the wood, and would have been the loveliest bit of colour there but for the hair that fell over it, and that the wind blew in all directions as she moved, and often drew it in one golden cloud upwards, as if trying to lift her by it from the earth, to which she scarcely seemed to belong. Her hat had been taken off to form a basket for her flowers. Her face was wonderfully animated, considering her loneliness, and the quietness of her occupation ; it kindled and waned like a star down there in the wood all by itself ; and it was impossible for David not to keep

looking at it, though he said in his heart bitterly, that this was one of the false prophets which had so misled him.

Suddenly the little primrose-gatherer caught sight of him, and hailed him with a prolonged bird-like cry of his name, broken up into shakes, and rising into the shrillest of silvery sounds at the last syllable of it, after having gone almost startlingly low just before.

‘Da-a-a-a-a-a-a-vid!’

In the new dignity of his sorrow, David leaned his head upon his hand, his elbow on his knee, and tried to consider the childish greeting as beneath his notice, unworthy his attention.

He could not, however, resist peeping gloomily through his fingers, to see how his little friend took such unusual treatment.

She looked puzzled, then troubled, and was for threading her way up to him through the brambles, when three small shock-headed children coming along by the stream made her afraid to leave her primroses. She ran back to them, and busied herself in making them into two bundles,

which, by dint of squeezing them out of all life and form, she managed to hold in her small hands.

Still appearing abandoned to grief and gloom, David watched her coming towards him, dividing her attention between her two bouquets, which she carried well in front of her with great care and pride, and indeed was so absorbed in them as to fail to look to her footing, so that she slipped several times before reaching him.

Coming close in front of David she stooped, and her small face growing wide-eyed and excited in anticipation of his enjoyment, touched his nose with one of her bunches of primroses.

David turned his face impatiently away.

The child looked puzzled and grieved; then, as if with sudden inspiration, stooped again and applied the other bunch. The nose was turned away still more impatiently.

This appeared to astonish the little would-be comforter beyond expression.

After gazing at his face with her knees still bent before him, she glanced perplexedly first at one of her closely-packed bunches, then at the

other, to see if the fault by any chance could lie with them.

Assured apparently of the impossibility of this, she looked again at David, and comforted herself with the thought that he was absorbed in some difficult lesson, as she had often known him to be. But he had no book—perhaps then he was only pretending to be sulky, and would shout and jump at her in a moment to startle her. She therefore suddenly stepped aside a little, with her bright eyes fixed on him in merry suspicion, one foot so planted, and her body so leaning away from him as to be ready for instantaneous flight.

David's continued silence, however, giving her courage, she ventured to approach on tiptoe and shout in his ear in the shrill fairy treble—

‘David!’

This having no effect, she went round and called in the other ear in the deepest fairy bass—

‘David!’

The bowed head remaining apparently insensible still, a slight frown of pain and perplexity began to knit the delicate golden eyebrows, while the lips quivered, and then compressed; and giving

way suddenly to her fear and wonder, the child threw herself on her knees before David, uttering passionate repetitions of his name with hysterical laughter, and beating the primroses against his arm—

‘David! David! David!’

‘Go away, Miss Williams,’ said David, looking up suddenly, stung by the sound of her laughter, and speaking with unkind vehemence—‘go away—I hate unfeeling girls!’

At this the flowers were dropped, and the little figure retreated till its back touched a stripling oak-tree, against which it leaned, drawn up on its toes, and gazing at David in the greatest wonderment.

At last the eyes, wide with surprise and pain, began to show the glitter of a babyish tear in each, and a baby finger was placed on the lips which tremblingly ejaculated—

‘Well, if ever—!’

The grief and amazement expressed in these words, and the patient silence following them, made David suddenly remorseful for the pain he was inflicting in his own selfish sorrow.

‘I didn’t mean to be cross, Nest,’ he said gently, ‘but I wish you’d go away.’

‘Why?’ asked Nest, ‘whatever have I done, David?’

‘Nothing,’ answered David impatiently. ‘Only it’s no use you staying here. You know nothing about trouble. Go away. Oh! I wish you’d go away.’

A mournful intelligence danced in Nest’s blue eyes. She began to understand the grievance David had against her. She knew she was very ignorant in comparison with David, and often offended him because she always preferred playing to trying to learn the things he wished to teach her; and she felt that now he had indeed touched upon a truth it behoved her to be very much ashamed of.

‘Oh! how much I wish I knew,’ she thought, ‘and then David would talk to me instead of sending me away.’

She leaned her back against the tree, and looked sadly upward with her hands behind her, because she had seen many a child at the village school (which she often visited as an idle little lady)

seem to find out a forgotten lesson by staring up at a corner of the ceiling, and Nest used to wonder if the angels wrote it there for the poor little dunce, and then rubbed it out very quickly, for Nest had seen nothing when she looked but the fly-marks and the damp-stains.

But though Nest put her hands behind her and looked up in the same manner she had seen the little ones at school do, no clue to the mystery that perplexed her met her earnestly seeking, piteous blue eyes; on the contrary, everything seemed joyously evading the question of her heart—what trouble might be?

The bright sky bore no token of any such thing; the birds seemed to know nothing whatever of the subject, nor to think it worth enquiring into; the very young small leaves about her, all looked as innocently ignorant as Nest herself.

Finding thus no enlightenment anywhere, Nest turned to David suddenly, and sitting down beside him, gave his arm a vehement grasp with her tiny hands, and leaned a pale, determined face against his shoulder.

‘I know I don’t know what trouble is David,’ she said, ‘but don’t send me away; I *want* to know—and I *will* know.’

At first David stared at her, then laughed, then his eyes, with the laughter still in them, filled with tears, and he laid his hands on her shoulders exclaiming with a voice as strong as if he had never a grief in him,—

‘You don’t know, and you *shan’t* know—from me—you dear, dear little thing!’

Nest, however, resisted such patronising pity, and pressing to him, besought earnestly that he would tell her what trouble was.

‘Yes, David—I do want to know—make me know what it is.’

‘That I will never!’ declared David still more manfully, as he kissed her and smiled over her entreating face. ‘No! she *shan’t* know what it is from me; no, not if I had to be blown up in the mine every other day, and drowned the days between, and come alive again every night!’

‘Ah!’ cried Nest, with a sharp ring in her baby voice. ‘*Now* I know. Oh! David; you’ve got to go and work in the mine!’

‘Well, and if I have,’ returned David, ‘what of that?’

Nest stared at him amazedly, for she had well known his horror at such a fate.

‘You didn’t suppose it was that I was miserable about, *did* you now?’ asked David, firm in his determination to deceive her.

‘Yes I did, David,’ answered Nest frankly.

David laughed and said—

‘Oh! you stupid!’

‘Then what is it?’ enquired Nest, still dubious.

‘Why, Tom Evans will get the prize through me leaving school of course; that’s what’s put me out.’

‘And that’s all?’ asked Nest.

‘There’s *twelve* striking,’ said David, jumping up, ‘and I’ve got to meet father soon;—come along—look sharp!’

Nest rose, and gave him her hand, and they went together through the wood.

They did not get along very quickly, for David, in spite of his injunction to Nest to hurry, soon slackened his pace, and showed a decided inclination for loitering.

As they went, David chatted in quite a cheerful manner, till some of the courage which he had assumed for her sake began really to cheer and strengthen his heart.

Nest, with a perception beyond her years, not only suspected something of the truth, but also understood it was better for David that he should not know she suspected it.

On this account she answered to all David said as cheerfully as possible. To do this her answers had to be very prompt and very brief; and she kept her eyes widely open to the sunlight, so that anything like tears might, she thought, be ashamed to appear there.

No one watching these two, and hearing their talk, could have guessed that they were both engaged in trying to deceive each other as earnestly as grown-up people might.

David now saw his father in the distance, and fearing what he would say, moved to take leave of Nest suddenly, as if he must hasten to him. He therefore said good-bye almost more carelessly than Nest could bear.

She clutched his hand very tightly, nor would

all the staring she could do keep the tears back any longer. David let her keep his hand, but smiled, and would not trust himself to look at her.

Both children suffered, though David's new courage still remained with him, but the chill breath of pain was blowing for the first time on Nest's life in its all frail blossom, and shaking it cruelly.

Both had a vague sense which neither could have expressed, that the childish paradise the wood behind had been to them was closed for ever, and that some invisible angel stood there preventing their return.

At last David took her hat from her trembling hands, and tied it on, pretending not to notice how her little throat swelled and tightened under the strings. Then, looking at her brightly, he patted her on both cheeks, and strode away as fast as he could towards the Overman, feeling as bold and triumphant as a soldier who, hastening to hot battle, has half succeeded in persuading the woman he loves that there will be no fighting where he goes.

Nest lingered a moment, then set off running towards her home; but as she went faster than her strength would let her go for many yards, she soon stopped and sat down in the grass at the side of the road, where she allowed her tears to fall as fast as she could wipe them away with her pinafore.

After this she rose and walked homewards with feeble but demure and womanly steps, looking no longer for the angel's writing in the corner of the sky.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BATTLE OF THE PLANS.

WHILE Israel, after leaving the farm, paced along slowly through the little wood, in labouring thought, towards the village to execute some errand which had been entrusted to him by the manager, and which had given him the opportunity to be away from the mine without danger of exciting comment, who should he see but the manager himself turn the corner by the nearest houses, and begin to ascend the hill towards the Farm.

Barrett was evidently hurrying his movements ; his face looked red, and a long roll of paper was in his hand.

A dusky light, the ghost of a smile, passed over Israel's face as he said to himself, 'Plans, of course ! I forgot that two could play that game !'

Israel moved a few steps aside out of sight ; then, after a brief pause, he returned, took just one glance after the fast-retreating figure, and began himself to walk towards his own cottage at a pace that would have excited the astonishment of any of the neighbours who might have seen him, and remembered that never in their whole lives before had they beheld such a spectacle as Israel sweeping along at the rate of a prize pedestrian.

But even this speed did not appear to satisfy him, for he stopped suddenly before an aged but still hale man, who was smoking as he leaned against the threshold of his door, and addressed him—

‘Martin, I am wanted up at the squire’s just now, and have left something at home. Will you fetch it for me, and bring it up?’

‘O ay! But I can’t go very fast now-a-days, Master Israel.’

‘No. How long must I give you? You won’t have to wait there.’

‘Ten minutes ’ll take me there, say five to stop—that’s a quarter—and then there’s the hill, worse

luck, I can't manage that with my short breath, under half an hour.'

'Three-quarters altogether, too much I fear. But there's no help. Quick then. Go yourself to my bedroom, unlock the big box you'll find there—here's the key—and take out a roll tied with red tape! There are other rolls, but the one tied with red tape is the right one. Red tape, mind! When you have got it, lock the box again—bring back the key, with the roll, and bring both up yourself, unless you can find some one you can trust who will move more quickly. David, my boy, will do, if you can find him, or anyone who is strong and swift, and can run the whole way up. I shall give you a shilling, and if you can find another to help I shall give him a shilling too. But then I shall expect it at the Farm in half an hour.'

He took out his watch.

'It is now just upon twelve. You will send it by half-past, or bring it by a quarter to one?'

'I will.'

Israel paused just to see the old man start, which he did with creditable energy; then he

re-entered the wood, and saw in the distance David, and a little girl, that looked like Nest, just separating. David came running to meet him. Asking no questions about his companion, Israel bade him go as fast as he could home, and bring up to the Squire's the roll that old Martin had gone to take from the big box.

‘Run David, thou know'st not how much depends on thy speed.’

Away went David, and then Israel himself turned and ascended the hill with extraordinary rapidity; never pausing from fatigue, never panting from want of breath, but with his wiry, muscular frame evidently capable of far greater efforts than any he was putting forth.

Presently he overtook the postman, who asked him if he was going up to the Farm, and would take the Squire's letters.

‘Yes,’ was the reply.

While the letters were being sorted out, Israel put forth his finger and touched a letter that the postman kept passing by.

‘For Mr. Barrett?’ he asked.

‘Yes.’

‘ Well, he’s up there ; so I’ll take that too.’

‘ Why, Israel, I don’t know what’s the matter, but he came to me quite excited-like, the other day, when you took his letters for him, and almost swore they had been opened.’

‘ Guilty conscience, Owen. Do you think I’d do that ?’

‘ No.’

‘ The Squire would like to see him have that letter without delay.’

‘ Well, Israel, he didn’t directly order me not to give them to you, so we’ll try once more.’

The postman gave the letters, glad to escape a toilsome walk, and Israel resumed his former pace.

One moment only he stopped. It was to eye the letter carefully all over. It was from the same correspondent who had so frequently written of late to the manager.

Israel knew that, for he had studied Mr. Barrett’s letters very carefully of late. The post-mark indicated a place that was a perfect maze of collieries. Israel had heard nothing—read nothing—about Barrett’s private affairs ; but he

had watched him closely, and come to the conclusion that the manager was seeking a new and possibly more profitable post; or else—and that thought struck Israel in a specially sinister point of view—he knew the dangers and future discredits of the mine, and was intending to retire safely before the day of that deluge which Jehoshaphat, with almost cynical enjoyment, had anticipated.

‘There’s a look about the writing of this address I like,’ muttered Israel. ‘It means decision.’

‘But then is it Yes, or No?’

‘I’m a fool to ask that, or to care about it. Yes or No matters little; but will the affair get to the knowledge of the squire? That’s the question.’

He neither knocked nor rang when he reached the Farm, but went in where he knew there would be an open door. He met a servant, but the only cognizance he took of the fact was to ask her, under his breath—

‘Has Mr. Barrett gone in to the Squire?’

‘O yes, directly he came.’

‘Somebody will bring me a roll of paper pre-

sently. Let me have it—'tis for the squire—the instant it comes.'

'Very well.'

'Just tap, and leave it against the door. I shall hear.'

Passing her without further word, he knocked softly at the door, and receiving no answer, as he expected none, went in.

His first act was to stand and look about him; his second, to take off his hat, which he had hitherto forgotten.

Griffith Williams was in his usual place, the chair of state, holding up with both hands a plan of some part of the mine; while the manager was leaning over him, and pointing out with his finger certain portions of it concerning which they were talking.

'Israel back again? That's lucky. Sit down.'

Israel did so, and the conversation went on for some time without seeming to interest him. Suddenly his posture changed.

'Then,' the Squire was saying, 'apart from minor operations and reparations generally through

the mine, levels number one, number five, and number six, are the only ones about which we need be anxious, or incur heavy expense for "dead work."

'That's correct, sir,' said Mr. Barrett.

'And the new district you have just opened out, and which promises to be so productive—are you quite sure that will involve no great demand on capital?'

'Quite, sir,' responded Mr. Barrett.

'Only a new shaft!' said Israel from his corner, in a deep sepulchral voice.

Now as a new shaft is in ordinary circumstances about one of the most costly operations the mining engineer can engage in, it is no wonder that the remark disturbed Griffith Williams's luxurious equanimity.

'What does he mean by that?' he asked of the Manager.

'Can't say, I'm sure. I only know that the ventilation is excellent at present, with the down-cast and upcast in one and the same shaft.'

Again came forth the sepulchral voice—

‘One shaft won’t do for the new district. And if it would, Parliament wouldn’t let it. Why, they say the bill’s passing now.’

Griffith looked from Israel to Barrett, and back from Barrett to Israel, and could not doubt, the one had been making things pleasant, the other was making them true.

He began from that moment to watch the two men closely, while continuing the conversation.

‘As to these levels, numbers one, five, and six, if we do not put them in a thorough state, is it certain that we can go on winning coal from them for a considerable period?’

‘Oh, quite.’

‘Not in number six,’ again asserted the sepulchral voice from the far corner of the room.

‘Why?’ asked his employer.

‘Because folk have been before us there.’

‘Nothing of the kind, Mr. Griffith, I assure you,’ said the Manager; ignoring, as he had done throughout, Mort’s presence, except when compelled to reply to him.

‘Look in your map, Mr. Barrett,’ said Israel.

‘I is you, Israel,’ said Griffith, ‘who must look

there. Get up, and come here, where we can speak to you without shouting.'

Israel rose and walked slowly to the table, and looked over the shoulder of the Manager, who had leaned down to inspect the plan.

'All right, ain't it, Mr. Barrett? You find the old works there—a little beyond the face of level number six?'

'Pray look again, Mr. Griffith, for yourself a moment,' appealed the Manager, half in scorn, yet half in trepidation, for Israel's manner suggested he knew not what cause of fear.

'I do look, and see nothing indicated but a most valuable field of coal. Stoop, Israel; here, over my arm. Don't be afraid.'

'I never was yet, sir.' Then, after a pause, he added, seeing his employer's heightened colour: 'Fear don't do for an Overman, sir.'

'True,' said Griffith, appeased. 'Well, do you find any abandoned works there, beyond the face of level number six?'

'I'm obligated to say no; and it ain't a pleasant thing to say.'

'Why, Israel?'

‘Because it ought to be there.’

‘Prove that, and ——;’ the impulsive man stopped in time.

Israel took no advantage—seemed to see none that could be taken. He walked slowly and heavily across the room, more slowly even than was usual with him. He enjoyed for once in his life the position of chief actor in a little drama, which might turn out only a miserable wretched farce—involving, however, quite enough of tragedy to give it dignity to him—or might prove a pleasant, agreeable comedy, with a most satisfactory *dénouement* of commercial sentiment.

It was to the door he went, to fetch his roll. He knew it was there—he had heard the tap outside. He went, and returned with it.

Slowly he untied the red tape, and placed it methodically on the table; slowly unrolled the bundle, which consisted of various papers; took one away from the rest, and placed it aside while he re-rolled the others; and then, and then only, did he display to the astonished eyes of the two men an entire plan of the mine, of the rudest description of manufacture, vilely coloured, black-

ened with the stains from colliers' hands, greased with drops from colliers' candles ; but still a plan that was vividly, staringly intelligible in every detail, and showing, at the first glance of the instructed eyes that now looked upon them, most important differences between it and the official plan of Mr. Barrett, which still lay there under the hand of his employer.

‘ Who made this ? ’ was that gentleman’s immediate enquiry.

‘ I did.’

‘ How, when, and where, in the name of heaven, could you accomplish this if you did not take it from other maps ? ’

‘ Actual survey, sir ; actual survey ! ’

‘ Indeed ! And you were able to make such a survey alone—with no help from others ? ’

‘ It looks like it, sir ; don’t it ? Hard work, and uncommon difficult. I was more often wrong than right when I began ; and so I found when I had to put my calculations together and make ’em agree. I ought to ha’ known better. It was the iron in the mine that put me out. And I had to take up the tramway, a bit at a time, as oppor-

tunity offered ; or when I couldn't do that, I had to get the rails covered with straw, and then, again, upon the straw I had to put a tidy layer o' small coal. You see, sir, iron and the magnetics plays the deuce with the compass. They won't work together in harmony nohow—not in surveyin'.'

'And at what times was all this done?' asked Griffith, in undisguised admiration.

'Not in my employer's time ; be sure o' that, sir. I always worked at night ; my reg'lar occupations, as you know, belongin' to the day. Mr. Barrett can speak for himself as to whether or no I have been a careless or a diligent servant.'

Mr. Barrett was not able to complain, and was in no mood to compliment, so remained silent and sullen.

And then, perhaps for the first time in his life, was Israel's form seen to swell with pride, his swarthy face to glow with conscious self-satisfaction. After a pause he went on—

'I've been waiting more than twenty years for my time to come ; and this, and things like this, naterally became my best helps to patience.'

‘And have you studied everything about mines and mining in this thorough spirit?’

‘Try me, sir; or let Mr. Barrett take me in hand. I’m ready.’

Griffith smothered an inward laugh, as he said to the Manager—

‘Barrett, have you looked at his map?’

‘He doesn’t seem inclined to let me.’

This was not exactly correct. Israel, for reasons of his own, had rolled up a part of his plan, and placed the remainder between Barrett and Griffith. But the Manager, after a rapid glance at level number six, and the ground adjacent, which it was intended he should look at, put his hands upon the paper, and moved one of them against the rolled part, as if to unroll it for convenience. This Israel instantly stopped, with the remark—

‘Your map is yours, Mr. Barrett, and mine is mine. Let each crow upon his own dunghill.’

‘Well, how is it?’ asked Mr. Griffith Williams, after a significant pause.

‘I don’t believe in his plan.’

‘All right,’ said Israel: ‘to-morrow morning I’ll show the place where I once bored through,

and nearly got into a mess ; and if Mr. Barrett likes to have a swim without the necessity of learning the art, he has only to say the word.'

'You startle me, Israel! Did you certainly leave all safe?'

'That, too, you shall see to-morrow, sir. That level is the dryest in the mine, and has been for years.'

'Well, Barrett?'

'Well, sir,' responded the Manager, 'he has been here much longer than I have. Of course, a manager who is more often out of the mine than in it, must depend upon his Overman, who is always there. But he deserves to be prosecuted for not giving proper information.'

'In my Overman's book,' said Israel, looking at the agent, and then at a little memorandum he took from his pocket, 'bearing on the fly-leaf my name, and the date of the year (which he named)—the book which I gave you on your own request, on account, as you said, of various valeyble memoranda in it—you will find entered, under Wednesday, April 14, the particulars of this very occurrence.'

‘ I know of no such book. I never received it. It’s all nonsense ! ’ exclaimed Barrett, loudly and angrily.

‘ Given to Mrs. Barrett, ’ began Israel, reading monotonously, and with an air of utter indifference, from another book, the place ready marked with a card, ‘ on the 1st of January, the year after, at the same time that she gave me five shillings, and said it was a Christmas-box from Mr. B., and remarked, with a laugh, she wondered which was the best Christmas-box of the two—the book or the money.’

‘ If she took it, she never gave it me.’

‘ Ah, indeed ! she said, when I asked her afterwards, she had given it. Would the Squire like me to fetch her ? ’

The Squire waited to see if Mr. Barrett answered the question ; but, noting his silence and confusion, did not think it necessary to say anything either.

And now Israel drew forth his letter.

‘ The postman gave me this for you with the Squire’s letters, ’ he said to Barrett.

The Manager snatched it from Israel’s hand, glanced at the writing, then at Israel’s face, which

met his own immovably ; and then, with somewhat nervous fingers, thrust it, as he thought, into his pocket.

Israel's hand, with the letter which he had picked up, was thrust forth before him the next minute, and the circumstance, though slight, visibly increased the Manager's confusion.

'Don't stand on ceremony, Barrett, read your letter if you like, while Israel and I study the map,' said Mr. Williams.

Had Mr. Barrett really been sure that Israel was incapable of tampering with his letter, as he certainly was, he would have preferred to read it at home ; but the thought that Israel, his deadly enemy as he now considered him, might know the contents, determined him to know them, too, without delay, critical as he believed they must be.

Should they be what he hoped, he might yet let both Israel and the foolish Squire know a bit of his mind.

He read, and his face paled. The long negotiations with the owners of a great colliery were at an end ; something had disturbed them, perhaps his too exacting demands, and so the letter

was simply a brief, moderately polite, and rather curt note of rejection—unconditional, absolute.

Griffith could not fail to divine, by the aid Israel's attitude afforded, the nature of this letter, but was too much of the gentleman to even hint a question on the subject.

He was known to be generous, and Mr. Barrett seemed in these eventful moments to determine to play a bold part, and trust to his employer's generosity for success in it:—

‘Mr. Jehoshaphat and I did not get on very well together, and he did not fairly put me on my mettle as regards responsibility by giving me an equivalent of power. Hence many shortcomings on my part. I wished to leave him, and wrote to an eminent firm. We negotiated, but I should have at once put a stop to these negotiations when you, sir, became the owner, had I had any reason to rely on your favour. But this letter definitely ends my chances there. I am free and ready to devote myself to your service henceforward, and will promise you there shall be no lack of zeal, care, or discipline.’

Griffith looked undeniably pleased, and

altogether Israel's chances seemed hopelessly lost to all eyes but his own.

'Do you wish to examine any other part of my map?' he asked, while carefully avoiding to display anything but what they had previously seen.

'Does—does it differ much in other respects?' asked Mr. Griffith Williams.

'This—that you have seen—is perhaps the least important of the differences. There are questions of future profit here as well as questions of future danger or loss.'

'And *there* you think, Israel, *you* alone ought to make not only the explanations, but the use?'

'Twenty years is a long time to wait; but I'm content now.'

'Ha! how is that?'

'Because you are a just man and an enlightened man, and can see that my time has come—honestly come.'

'Upon my life, Israel, I cannot gainsay you. Mr. Barrett, I shall pay you the equivalent of a quarter's notice, and both I and Mr. Israel Mort, my future manager, will gladly do our best to promote your interests. And, by the bye, Israel,

a day or two after the funeral is over, say this day week, expect me at the mine.'

'The world comes to him who waits.' These words had met Israel's eye while yet a comparatively young man. They had been to him as a sudden light in the darkness of his lot, which he felt to be an infinitely deeper darkness than any he had known in the mine. They clung to him until, through some strong law of mutual attraction between him and the truth they conveyed, they became a part of his daily life, his one article of faith that nothing could shake.

And he *had* waited with invincible patience, speaking to no one of what he was doing and expecting; moving on, alike without sympathy or counsel; never going out of his way to make weak, because premature, experiments for success; bearing his hard lot, not with gentleness or Christian fortitude certainly, nor with the charity that thinketh no evil, but bearing it with an unshrinking resolve, that lacked only noble motive to be heroic.

How is he feeling now, as he descends the hill,

full of the consciousness that his hour had come —had passed, and that he had been equal to it, had wrung out of it full payment, with interest, for all fortune's debt?

Does the heart, hardened by such long adversity, begin to thaw?

Is he moved, as he thinks of taking the news to that poor wife at home, whom he, more than his poverty, had so utterly crushed down?

Will David now see the gloom that is fast spreading over his boyish fancies, melt away, and leave the world what it was before, beautiful as youth's own dreams, full of promise as youth's own desires? Will he be spared the ordeal of the mine to-morrow morning?

CHAPTER VIII.

DAVID'S FIRST DAY IN THE MINE.

WHILE it was still dark, cold, and raw, David, who knew nothing of his father's change of fortune, was awakened to his great trial.

Israel had lain a heavy hand on him and shaken him; and the boy, who had been dreaming of wandering in naked innocence all night on the banks of a river with an angel, who told him at last she was called Nest, opened his eyes in such sweet trust and utter forgetfulness of what lay before him, that Israel himself was somewhat troubled to meet the change that must come as memory came, and the stupor of sleep passed away.

The yet unconscious eyes were swollen with last night's tears, in which the boy's soul had drifted to that sweet sleep, that harbour of for-

getfulness and peace, which children, however sorely their burdens press upon them, scarcely ever fail to reach.

David had reached it, and been welcomed and cherished in it like some ship resting at home on the last night before a perilous voyage.

And there, as has been said, sweet dreams had visited him, old childish joys that he had half forgotten pressed softly to his heart again, and without bringing the sense that they were taking their last leave.

He woke at his father's hard touch, full of love for all the world; and springing to his elbow smiled up sweetly in Israel's inexorable face.

'Now, my boy—up with you! No more miss-fires! The day has come when you are to be a man.'

Yes, it *had* come—the day and moment of the great change. The alternations of hope and fear were for him no more. The blow had fallen. From that moment the flower of David's childhood was crushed never to rise again. The bitterness of a too early manhood came upon him. The dew of his life's morning, which was sparkling in

his eyes when his father woke him, rolled down in two icy tears, and was gone for ever.

His teeth chattered ; he drew away his shoulder from under Israel's hand ; slipped from his little bed, and drew his clothes on him, and his misery with them—like a man indeed.

He descended the stairs, and found his mother blowing the fire. Not daring to glance towards him, she went on with her task.

She sickened with the fear of hearing suddenly the cry for help of those lips which might still be taking their life from her bosom—so did their least complaint thrill through it to her heart's core.

But all was silent, save Israel's heavy monotonous tread above, and the crackling of the sticks in the fire over which she was trying to boil the milk for this bitter breakfast.

At last, when she had succeeded, and was turning to pour it upon David's bread, she turned and saw him already dressed, sitting in his place, white as death, in his pit-garb.

Before she could shape her lips to say a few words to him—and while hesitating as to whether

she might kiss him without some new and dangerous outburst of feeling from one or both—Israel descended and joined David at the table.

From that moment she dared not speak. And David never looked at her. And so in silence they passed on to the moment when Israel rose, and said,—

‘Now David, we must start!’

Then, as she saw the boy rise and take his cap, and stand by the door waiting, she could bear her anguish no longer, but went to him, and drew him to her bosom, and kissed him.

He was as cold as frost. He did not return her kisses, but his great blue eyes looked at her in passive acknowledgment of her love and helplessness.

As the pair reached the pit-mouth they found themselves among a great crowd of roystering, half-civilised boys, youths, and young men, with a very moderate sprinkling of older colliers—all waiting their turns to go down in the cage, which was kept in rapid and incessant motion.

Some were drying their damp clothes by the blazing fire; some roasting potatoes; some

smoking; and as any left their places at the call to go down, the vacancies were instantly filled by new comers.

It so happened that David was left standing alone by the pit-mouth while his father went into the little grimy office to hear the news of the night from the night-deputy Rees Thomas, and to arrange with some of the colliers about their work for the day.

Then, standing alone by the pit-mouth, David felt a kind of horrible fascination come over him in watching the cage, full of crouching, grimy men and boys, glide down—down—down—into that narrow, yet awful, abyss; which James Lusty, the day deputy, who spoke to him cheerily from time to time, told him was fifty times deeper than the height of the tallest ship's mast.

And then to see the empty cage glide swiftly up again, and fit for a moment so smoothly and noiselessly into its place, filling the entire aperture, blotting out that hideous other world below, as David would have liked to have seen the mine itself blotted out from all creation, but concealing it for a moment only; and then the in-rush of

another grimy mass of living beings, immediately followed by the sharp sounds of the signal-hammer—by the rush and roar and feverish gasps of the breathless engine—panting as if in a deadly race, and then its slackening pace and gradual quietude, as the cage was nearing the bottom.

The sounds of the voices and laughter of the colliers thrilled through the boy's soul, and strangely excited his fancy; they were at first so loud, and clear, and brimming over with vigorous life, and then so hollow, faint, and sepulchral, till there could only be heard a mere murmur, the last faint breath, so it seemed, of dying humanity, ceasing the useless struggle with fate, and sinking into—What? There the boy's imagination refuses to go farther, but stops with the instinctive feeling it would be wisest so to do.

Suddenly he hears his father's voice speaking to James Lusty.

'David'll want a couple of candles to light him in and out of the pit.'

'Ay,' said Lusty. 'But mightn't Master David have a lamp to keep burning?'

'Let him have what others have—neither more

nor less. Take that once for all. And as to Master David, no more of that nonsense ; I'm the only master here.'

'Ahl right, master!' said Lusty, who still retained just a touch of his northern dialect. Squeezing the hand of David, as he stood between the two, he hung a pair of thin, wretched-looking candles, like a ghastly necklace, round the boy's neck.

Israel, Lusty, and David went down together in the lowest compartment of the cage. David raised nor hand, nor voice, nor glance in resistance to anything he was told to do. When his father said, 'Go in, David,' he went in. When his father told him to stoop he stooped, and then found Lusty's arm encircling him, and Lusty's ugly and grimy, but not unkind face close to his, bent most uncomfortably down, and twisted half-way round through the efforts of the owner to accommodate his height and bulk to the limited space afforded, and to the service of David.

Israel said nothing to his son in the descent ; not from want of feeling, but from a true instinct that nothing he could say would be likely to do

any good ; and he was, therefore, according to his wont, silent.

Perhaps it would have been as well if Lusty had followed his superior's example. But he was full of sympathy with the pale, timid, scholarly lad, and he could think of no other way of showing it than by talking of the mine, and of those features of it which Lusty always found so interesting to strangers, and about which his own sensitiveness, if he ever had any, had long passed away.

So with a sort of quiet glee he whispered to David about these funny ' forrin ' chaps—the Belgians—who called the shaft the grave ; and then putting into David's mouth the query, Why ? answered by characteristically brief narratives (for Lusty couldn't talk much, but blurted out at once whatever he had got to say) about accidents and adventures he and his comrades had experienced in going up and down shafts—ending by a most exciting account of a fight between two colliers while descending in a bucket, which story was stopped short by the arrival of the cage at the bottom, and by Israel's stern and dry command to Lusty to hurry away to where a shot had to be

fired. The story was stopped short and never completed, for David when he again met his friend had supped full of horrors, and had no heart to ask for the conclusion, and was only wishing he could tell Lusty without offending him how very far from amusing he found such talk.

Meantime the deputy thought it but common humanity to do his best to make the lad forget his own particular troubles; and seeing him gaze with pallid, wonder-stricken eyes on the deep, dark pool of water just at the bottom of the shaft, could not help stopping for a moment to explain that that was the sump, or pit, into which all the water of the mine drained; and that presently he would see the great spears of the pump—those enormous beams of timber, hanging in endless succession from top to bottom of the shaft—begin to work up and down to carry all the water away; and he finished off by warning David to be careful, for a very nice gentleman had been drowned there only a few weeks ago.

The boy's soul sunk within him. Every word he heard seemed but to confirm the ideas of danger with which he had come down. Still he

moved on by the side of his father and Lusty mechanically, now staring at the dead blackness of the walls and roof, now at the faint gleams of light from the lamps reflected back from the surface of the water through which he was wading, stumbling at every few yards, and helped up again by Lusty, who would cry, forgetting, perhaps wilfully, Israel's recent injunction—

‘Ahl right, Master David! Up and at it again, as the Dook said at Waterloo;’ or ‘The mine’s a bit rough, Master David, at first, but will improve on acquaintance;’ or, again, ‘Eh—what—Master David?—larning ahl the mine’s tricks at once, so as the better to circumvent ’un by and bye ’

The lad heard with his ears, but had no more actual comprehension of the meaning of the words than he had of the meaning of those mysterious sounds produced by the ventilating apparatus, which ever and again alarmed him with vague fears of some imminent catastrophe. Perhaps that was the awful Gas, of which he had heard so much, as a kind of invisible monster that would be quiet in mines for months and years together, and then

break out in flame and fury, and destroy everybody and everything within reach.

Not but what he struggled to cast off the paralysing spell that hung over him, and seemed to take away all impulsive individuality of life. As they passed on to where the colliers were at work, swarming like black bees in a black hive, David thought he would surely recognise some of them, and that then he would feel easier, and be able to talk; but the very bustle of the multitudinous industry of the place, the ceaseless passage of long trains of loaded trams, the shouts of the drivers of the horses, the hurried way in which he was pushed suddenly into a little refuge hole, that barely allowed him space to guard his limbs from the dark mass thundering past, tended to confuse his mind, to exaggerate his every fear, to make the whole place at once as chaotic and incomprehensible as it was terrible to him.

And his experiences, when he did succeed in breaking for a moment the spell that paralysed him, were not very encouraging to further attempts in the same way. As they were passing a stall, that opened on their right, David saw a

shovel stuck with the handle in the ground, in the very centre of the opening, and he noticed there was a big cross chalked upon it.

‘Please, what is that for?’ he timidly asked Lusty; who, delighted to find the boy recovering himself at last, and seeing Israel as usual in advance, and giving directions to some men who were opening a drift-way into a new district, he stopped and said,—

‘Ah, now, that’s right! If you only begin to take notice, it’s wonderful how interested you’ll be after awhile. That spade is a danger signal.’

‘Danger signal,’ faltered the boy.

‘Yes,’ said Lusty; ‘if the night deputy finds the gas bad in a place where men are to work in the day, he sticks a warning across the entrance, a spade as you see upside down, or a couple of sticks placed crosswise, or aught else that comes easy to hand; which is as much as to say to the colliers, when they come to work, “Don’t you go in here, my boys, or it’ll be worse for you.” But mind you, sometimes it’s only a hint to be careful, without stopping the work. “Ahlways keep the work going, Master David, if it be in any way

possible ;” that’s what the Owner says to the Manager, and the Manager to the Overman, and the Overman to the Deputy, and the Deputy to ahl the folk under him. And now, Master David, having done my dooty in teaching you that lesson, suppose we go on.’

They went on, and for some time alone, for Israel was called away ; and he had previously given a hint to Lusty that one or other of them was to be with David, till he had fairly made acquaintance with the mine and been set to work.

Noticing the damp on the walls in certain parts, and not on others, David again ventured timidly to put a question as to the reason, having, if truth must be told, overheard accidentally a few words between two colliers, as they passed him, which suggested quite other ideas than those of mere scientific or utilitarian curiosity.

‘Well,’ said Lusty, taking advantage of the exceptional height of the place where they happened to be to draw his form erectly up, and enjoy a good stretch, ‘that’s a point of ventilation, you see. The air as comes into a mine leaves

the walls dry, but that as goes out makes ahl this moisture.'

'Oh,' ejaculated David, with an unmistakeable tone of relief.

'Well now, what did you fancy about it, Master David?' asked Lusty, with some curiosity, as he held up his lamp to look at the boy's face.

'I—I thought I heard a man say there was a deal of water about, and that he shouldn't wonder if the sea some day didn't break in.'

'I'd like to let a good cudgel break into that fellow's head; but come along, Master David, and I'll show you something.'

They went on, David resisting with difficulty a great desire to say he didn't just then want to see anything he wasn't obliged to see.

Presently they stopped, and Lusty asked an odd question.

'Do you happen to know, Master David, when's high tide to-day?'

The lad's heart misgave him again about what he had heard the man say, and instinctively his eyes and hands went to the walls.

‘Dry as a bone, boy—dry as a bone. Feel! Don’t you find them so?’

‘Yes,’ said David, confused and ashamed that he had let his fear be so obvious.

Trying to push that thought away, he strove to answer Lusty’s previous question:—

‘It was high tide about six o’clock yesterday evening, I—I believe.’

‘Then it’s high tide now,’ said the deputy. ‘Look about you—touch the roof—you have felt the walls; could there be a more cosy, comfortable place, Master David? I mean as mines go, you know.’

David was fain to confess the place looked dry but, for all that, it was evident he already saw no end of horrors about it, for he knew well Lusty was going to startle him once more.

‘Well, Master David, if your mine larning were to go no further, you can say what’ll make folk stare ahl through your life—that you have been under the sea.’

‘Under the sea!’ faltered David.

‘That you have walked about there, and chatted

with an old friend, and weren't a bit obligated to hurry away before you chose to go.'

'Yes, yes, but please we'd better go. Father will be looking for us.'

'Listen, Master David; can you hear anything?'

Master David showed little inclination to listen with the requisite degree of attention and intensity of silence; but, for all that, if his face might be taken as an index, he heard enough and too much. Again he wanted to hurry away, but Lusty insisted on his making the effort demanded; and at last he was constrained to acknowledge once more in effect his silly cowardice, by owning, after fancying he heard many things, that he really heard nothing at all.

'Ah!' said the deputy, 'your young senses is a deal quicker than mine, and I thought you might now hear, as I have often heard, the big waves a breaking on the shore above us, and have heard 'em comin' in and goin' out, and what's most extor'nary, Master David—and I do think that strange—there ain't a many feet between us now and the salt water.'

'You don't work here now?' gasped David.

‘No, but we did, till we got ahl the coal out. Ah, Master David, I’ve had some awkward hours here. I mind well one day a collier came to fetch me, saying the sea was so uproarious they couldn’t stand it any longer. So I went to judge for myself. The noise was tremendous—awful; so I thought it best to take the hands away a bit; but next morning they went at it again, and ever since, the sea, as if put on its good behaviour by that unnecessary stopping of so many folks’ industry, and as if ashamed of the figure it might cut in our annual statistics, has never once given me the least occasion to find fault. And mind, it’s something, Master David, when a deputy says that.’

‘Yes, but please, oh do please come away,’ gasped David.

‘I’m coming! I’m coming. Do you know, Master David, I’ve heerd some mines goes as much as three miles straight out under the sea.’

‘Yes, but mayn’t we go now?’

‘Think o’ lying down and smoking your pipe, with ships in full sail sweeping along over your head.’

‘ Please do come.’

‘ To be sure. Fahls, Master David, is bad, and explosions don’t bear a good character ; but, by the lord, inundations bangs ahl. Why there was that mine at Workington, a most valleyable one, settled a’most in no time. You looked, and there was the mine ahl in working order, full of folk, and producin’ no end of coal ; and again you looked, and the mine was gone, was every bit on it under water. And there it lies now, done for, for evermore. No engines ’ll ever be found to drain that mine. The job’s a deal too big.

‘ Now, if this mine were to be caught one day in the same fashion, and it’s quite possible, we’d soon have it ahl right again. Why, Master David, what’s the matter, you look quite scared. I’m sure I’m doing my best to hearten you up a bit. Come, come, lad, pluck up courage. Courage, Master David, courage ; there’s no getting on in the world without that.’

So David thought too, and heartily wished he were out of the world, for a coward he knew he was, and a coward he feared he should ever remain.

Presently, in their onward course, the boy's soul was again appalled by the unearthly sounds he heard. It could not be the sea, for they were no longer under it; and yet David fancied no storm he had ever known raging on his native coast was more wildly tempestuous.

As they approached a canvas-covered door, the sounds increased so much in violence, that David in his fright could not even try to discover whether the form he saw dimly crouching in the corner by its side was one of his old school comrades or no.

It was no longer the simply grand sound of a stormy but distant sea he seemed to hear, but that of a sea in its fury, striving with repeated blows to overwhelm and destroy whatever might lie in its way.

Every instant the boy looked to see the door before him burst in with those mad spasms of overwhelming rage.

He could not speak, but looked all his anguish up in the face of the deputy, who once more tried his hand at comforting, and with somewhat better success than before.

‘Do you hear the mine, Master David, how it sings?’

‘Sings!’ gasped the boy.

‘Ay, to be sure, and such songs are more welcome to the miner when in the mine than the songs of ahl the throstles, and larks, and blackbirds that were ever born or bred in our bonny England! Their warblings tickle the ear a bit, and there’s an end, but yon singing keeps us ahl alive, keeps us ahl in breath, so that we can do some singing for ourselves, when we’ve a mind to, at our leisure.’

‘But what—is—it—then?’ asked David, feeling his confidence revive a little, in spite of the strangeness of the explanation.

‘Only the ventilatin’ apparatus at work; that big fan you seed in one of the houses above ground, thirty feet in diameter, and revolving in a second’s time, and so despatching every bit of air it finds near,—a sort of levy on mass as the forenners calls it you know, to drive out ahl other and worse airs it can find in the mine, and leave the bettermost behind, singing like a million of feathered creatures over its victory, till itself, like

human natur' begins to spile, and turn bad, and gets drove out generally in turn.'

'And is it—is it always so violent as this?' asked David, whose fears again were returning with the curiously intermittent rage of the wind-blows.

'Violent, Master David,' said the deputy with a grin, and evidently conscious of a forthcoming joke; 'you must be a jesting.' So saying he opened the fearful door; and no change ever wrought by an enchanter, could seem more miraculous to the boy than the one wrought now. Not a sound was to be heard; in one instant the raging tumults were hushed and gone, and the whole mine seemed buried in a repose that might not apparently have been broken for years.

Lusty roared as he saw the wonder in David's face, which brightened amazingly, and began to wreath itself in smiles, when lo! the door was again closed, and all the roar began once more, awful as ever to the boy's stricken imagination.

'Oh, please, Mr. Lusty,' he said, 'do let us get to father.'

They moved away, and for some time in deep silence; the deputy troubled that he could not get on better with the lad, and the lad sick to the soul with shame at what he knew Lusty must think and probably would say about him, but too much engrossed by the endless pitfalls and dangers in which he had to move to do more than strive to get away from them all as fast as possible.

Not the faintest ray of light entered still into the brain of the deputy, as to the true nature of the comfort he instilled with such admirable industry and devotion; and then, while he literally sweated with the unwonted intellectual exertions he made to 'brighten the boy up a bit,' he began again after a long pause with the remark—

'This is a queer thing we're coming to, Master David.'

'Is it?' responded the boy gloomily.

'You see we can't pass here, except on our hands and knees. Well, ten days ago, you might ha' stood upright at the same spot, though I couldn't.'

'What—what—is it then?' asked David, and

in very much the same sort of tone with which one of the tragic heroines of the antique drama might, when marked out by destiny for ceaseless misfortune, and while still throbbing with the pangs of the last calamity, ask, 'What next?'

'Oh, it's only the swellin' up o' the floor of the mine; it's a bit soft here, you see, and the roof's a trifle too heavy, and no wonder! We shouldn't like, Master David, to carry half a mile or so of rocks and coal on our backs—leastwise, we shouldn't like to do it long. And the mine feels that, and is hurt like at our puttin' so much on its shoulders. So the pillars o' coal which bear up the burden begin to press through the floor, and, so to say, right into its very body, until its flesh protrudes just like a piece of proud human flesh, and pushes us off, and shuts us up closer and closer, as if it'd like, if it knew how, to get rid of us ahltogther. We call it the creep, or crush.'

Poor David needed no further explanation. That word 'creep' was enough. Every nerve and sensation in his body seemed to thrill and quiver, and creep too, in more than sympathetic response.

Oh, when would the day be over, and he back again home, in his mother's arms?

That thought coming suddenly upon him made him burst into a wild passion of tears, which he managed, under the shelter of the darkness, to conceal from Lusty.

His new fear, however, quickened his sensations in one particular direction, and feeling his breathing impeded, while there was no perceptible breeze passing, as he had everywhere felt before, his eager fancy suggested a new alarm, that they were going into the innermost depths of the mine, where the air could not reach them, and where the 'gas' might be.

'Are we—going much farther in?' he faltered, after much deliberation to choose his words, so as to conceal the essence of his thoughts.

'No, Master David, we've just reached the place where we are to meet your father, and close by is the spot where he means to set you at work.'

He was to go to work then! And now! Was to stay there after enduring all this!

Vaguely he had begun to hope the intention might be to show him the mine—get him used

to it—and then let him out, so that he might try and pluck up courage to go a step farther on the morrow. That silly and cowardly dream was ended. He was presently to go to work, and with all these fearful thoughts in his mind that Lusty had instilled as his only companions.

The deputy now began to snuff the air with his nose, and peer about, and look at his lamp, and do something or other to it, which David could not understand.

But soon he saw the light in the lamp go down under Lusty's manipulations, down—down—down, till it got to a mere point.

The deputy then cautiously went a little apart from David, towards the opening to a natural recess, a kind of gigantic man-hole, before which hung a loose curtain. He knelt down, and slowly thrust the lamp forward, and David saw, with a shudder, there was a sudden elongation of the flame with a bluish tinge, and then a moment after, as the deputy lifted the lamp higher, there was an explosion, but inside the lamp only, and therefore as harmless in consequence as it was faint and insignificant in sound.

‘A touch of gas here,’ said Lusty, ‘but we’ll soon get rid of it, as I’ve done of old times in this very spot many a time afore. The way I’m going to show you, for the fun of the thing, ain’t permitted now. But you won’t tell tales out o’ school, Master David, will you?’

‘No,’ said David, in silent anguish.

The deputy, on account of the oppressive heat in those parts of the mine through which they had lately passed, had taken off a thick heavy overcoat. He put this down while he lighted a candle, and mounted it upon a flat piece of timber, so that it might travel with the timber without upsetting. He next attached to this strange apparatus a string; and so prepared, and drawing his overcoat across his head, face, and shoulders, he crept into the place where the gas was, David looking on with all the fascination a bird may feel while conscious of impending destruction.

He had previously told David there was a hole in the ground inside in which he should take shelter, but that he, David, need not be frightened, it would only be a puff and a flame, a bit stronger

and noisier, and brighter, than the one he had seen burst in the lamp, and that would be all: so saying, he went in, dropping the curtain carefully after him, on which David, while removing as far off as he could, fixed his eyes.

Lusty got into his hole, drew some loose boards around and partly over him, closed in his face and head with the overcoat, till he could only just see through a small aperture the lighted candle outside, then pulled away very slowly at his cord.

David saw the lighted candle begin its march, rather stately at first, then jumping and oscillating as it met obstacles, till it disappeared under the curtain.

He held his breath in suspense as to what was to happen now, but he bore pretty well the shock of the explosion, and the flame which burst through the opening of the curtain, but did no damage whatever.

Very proud was the deputy of the lesson in manhood he thought he had thus slyly given to his master's son, and which under any other aspect he knew he ought to be ashamed of, as against orders, and as setting an example to the men, if

it happened to become known, that would be most mischievous.

‘It’s only the “Rider,”’ he said to David when he returned, and the ‘Rider’ was then explained to be a thin vein of coal, which, if accidentally exposed, as this had been, gives off a good deal of gas.

At that moment Israel joined them.

‘Now, David,’ he said abruptly, and turned to lead the way.

The boy followed, feeling the time was come at last when he was to be placed in actual contact with that labour of the mine he had so long shrunk from in fear, and which the experiences of the morning made a thousand times more appalling to him than ever.

Presently Israel stopped, as in reflection, turned, and called in a loud, clear voice to Lusty—

‘Jem, there’s a shot to be fired in Morgan’s stall. Look to it yourself, to keep all safe.’

‘Ay, ay! sir,’ responded Lusty, using for the first time a new mark of respect for his employer, and dividing for ever the comrade-like connection that had so long existed between them.

Passing a stall where colliers were actively at work cutting coal, Israel again stopped for a moment, and said to David,—

‘Wait here. Don’t move, mind, or you may lose yourself. I shall be back presently.’

‘But, father, mayn’t I go with you?’

‘Come then.’

They went into the stall and followed its devious course till they got to the face of the coal where the heat was simply overpowering, and the space so confined that every portion of the work had to be done under great physical difficulty.

Here one collier knelt; another next him had the luxury of being able to sit; a third lay on his side; while others were prostrate on their backs, all nearly naked, all hewing away, all bathed in copious streams of perspiration.

After giving some directions to one of the colliers, Israel called David away, and went back to the level out of which they had branched, and resumed their former course.

Presently they came to a door, but instead of Israel’s opening it, or calling to the dark figure sitting in the deep gloom by its side to open it

for him, he stopped before that dark figure, and holding forth his lamp the better to see the youthful but preternaturally aged face that looked up to meet his, said—

‘Willis, is that you?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘How’s the ventilation?’

‘It’s been very violent, and then it stopped all of a sudden, hardly a mouthful of wind to be got anyhow.’

‘It’s violent enough now. I must see to it. We’re a long way from the fan, and a difficult way to reach besides. How old are you?’

‘Fourteen next St. David’s Day.’

‘And how is it you’ve found nothing better to do than opening doors at that age? Idle and careless, I suppose? Content to be whatever gives you the least trouble to think about?’

‘I didn’t want to be discharged by axing for something better.’

‘Can you drive—pony or horse?’

‘I often do to help the others.’

‘Very well. David, my son, will now take your place. Stay with him a few minutes to see

that he quite understands his duty. Then go to Lusty and say you're to be moved a step upwards, both in work and wages.'

The joyous light glistening in Willis's eyes alone told how pleased he was, for he said nothing, but turned in a kind of boyish sympathy towards David, whose face he did not know, and was trying to make out.

'Now, David,' said Israel, in his usual harsh tone of command, 'sit down where Willis was sitting, take the cord into your hand, and remember your duty is not merely to open the door whenever the trams want to pass, but you must listen for their coming, so that there may be no delay. They are noisy enough. You can't fail to hear if you are only attending. Mind that, and mind that the door can't be too quickly shut the moment the trams are through. Quick to open, quick to shut, and there's the whole duty of a diminutive man, my boy, described for you in little. Do this well, and you'll go on soon to do other things well, and then to do all things well by and bye. Hark! Do you hear anything?'

David's confused senses made him fancy he did hear vaguely some distant-sounding shout ; so he thought the trams must be coming, and he ought to open the door. He pulled sharply and the door stood open. Israel as sharply cried,—

‘Shut the door! Pull the string, can't you? There was nothing coming; as you'd have known if your wits hadn't gone wool-gathering.’ Then he added,—‘Too soon David's as bad as too late. Well, no, too soon's a good fault. Willis will tell you how to hit just the right point of time. Now I leave you. At noon I shall bring you something to eat. Quick to open and not too quick ; quick to shut and not too quick ; or you'll have the doors smashed by the tram that has not passed through. That's all I've got to say. Mind it all well, and you'll have me here some day, not very far off, on the same sort of errand to you that brought me now to Willis.’

Israel went off, and perhaps for a space of five minutes the two lads, who were left in the most absolute darkness, scarcely spoke to each other. Willis was silent from respect to his master's son, and to David's scholarship, whilst David's soul was

too full to speak, if he could help it, to anybody. His heart throbbed and beat as if it would burst; his brain was seething in wild tumult; his hands and feet were cold; his limbs ached; his body was feverish; life, in a word, just then was, taken altogether, so painful and confusing a thing that the wretched lad felt as though there would be no happiness like the happiness to die and be at rest, if only his mother might hold him in her arms, and Nest be near to see how manfully he, the coward, could die.

Suddenly it struck David that perhaps Nest, who was in many things a peculiar girl, might fancy it would be much more manly to show how he could live.

Cogitating over that thought a little, he came to the conclusion that Nest's fancy was not quite so hopelessly silly as at first it seemed, and that he was, after all, inclined to try whether he really could do what his father wanted, and see whether that did make a man of him. Oh, if he could be that, he thought, he might endure even the mine for a few months, or perhaps a year or two.

‘Now then! they’re coming,’ exclaimed Willis, as he nudged David’s arm.

David heard the train rattling noisily on, nigher and nigher, and, with hand nervously grasping the cord, waited for some signal to guide him as to the right moment.

He hears a shout, but it sounds too far off, he thinks, to be meant for him; and while hesitating, he hears another, as unmistakable as it was uncomplimentary in its terms. He pulls the cord, the door barely opens in time, and a horse and driver at the head of some empty trams appears and passes; and as they pass there comes a savage lash from the driver’s whip right across David’s head and face, and cutting so keenly into his cheek that David, with a cry of anger and pain, puts his hand to the place and feels the moist blood.

‘You’ll be quicker next time mayhap,’ shouted the driver, as he made his horse move quickly on and trotted away by his side.

‘He didn’t know,’ said Willis apologetically. ‘He thought it was only me. Never mind.’

When you're a driver yourself, you can do the same to the little 'uns. I shall.'

'Not to me, I hope,' said David.

'Oh no! not if I know it. I shall tell that big bully who you are, and he'll want to lick your feet the next time he passes. I'd let him for the fun of the thing. He is such a beast. I mean to fight him when I'm four year older. A sovereign a side, and if you like you shall hold the stakes and see fair play.'

As David listened to Willis's voice in the darkness, and listened with a sense of comfort, his thoughts were again striving to realise what it was he would have to go through to satisfy his father. So he put a question to his companion, who said,—

'This is the first job we all have to take to, opening and shutting doors. The next is driving the pony or horse. After that you come to hitching the trams together and unhitching, and then there's only one more move to put you up to the top of the tree as a real working collier. But, mind you, cutting coal ain't a art to be

sneezed at ; you must begin under another collier, who teaches you how to cut coal in the knowingest ways, and at the same time, by taking the best part of your wages, teaches you summat else, which you larns others in due course, of course.'

The lads laughed over this jest, shook hands, and Willis departed to seek his new post.

Again David thought, as he found himself alone, he would resolutely strive to master all the absurd fancies and fears that so unsettled him, and try to pass his life in the mine as quietly as he saw Willis did. He felt ashamed indeed as he reflected how little incentive Willis had to play his part in life in a manly fashion, and how much he, David, had. The one had to learn all, and endure all, and then have nothing to hope for beyond ; while the other had to learn and endure, merely that he might the better grasp the infinite things that lay beyond. Where the one's higher life ended the other's was to begin.

Insensibly his blood became calmer, his thoughts clearer, his fears less ready to rush upon him with a thousand new and horrible suggestions of fires and water and explosions, and falling roofs ; of

life-long deformities of limb or feature; of ghosts, and all the other terrible creations of a quick-witted boy's vivid fancy.

He almost wished his father would come that he might speak to him, and say he was now going to begin in truth the business of man-making.

He longed for something to do to attest his new courage, and show Jim Lusty that there was good stuff in him after all. This sitting hour after hour to pull a string was such cold-blooded work, that no boy could grow strong in doing that!

Musing thus, his attention was drawn to something that appeared distant and quivering through the darkness. Soon he fancied it a light, but it was still so faint he could not be quite sure. But each minute it grew more definite and bright, and was no doubt approaching. Soon David heard voices, and at last he sees emerge from the gloom two figures, each carrying a lamp and some strange tools, which they set down only some twenty or thirty yards from where the boy was.

The promise of companionship was pleasant—their voices and laughs pleasant—and David felt

strangely cheered at the thought they were going to work so near him.

But what were they going to do? The tools seemed to be a heavy long-handled hammer and a kind of heavy solid spike.

Before beginning they opened their lamps, at which David wondered, as he knew well that naked lights were forbidden, and he did not know how loosely as yet all these recent rules for improvements were observed. A man would say to himself, he knew quite well there was no gas anywhere near him (which probably was correct), and at once proceeded to legislate for himself, so as to get as much light as possible for his work.

David was then able to see the whole process of their special labour, while unnoticed by them.

Stripping to their work, and one of the men retaining nothing but a pair of drawers, David saw the other take up the long heavy spike, and hold it horizontally with its point against the rock, guiding it with his hands, whilst the other with the hammer struck so powerful a blow on

the massive end of the rod that the breath of the striker came forth with it so loud and violent, that it almost seemed to David as if the man himself had been struck rather than the instrument for penetrating the rock. Again came the blow and the wheeze at brief intervals, till, perhaps, some twenty or thirty blows had been struck, when the man had to rest, exhausted, while the other pulled out the pin to see how far it had gone. A little more than three-quarters of an inch! That was all.

Somehow, the incident seemed to say to David it was intended for his benefit. He felt ashamed as he watched how unremitting and how good-humouredly the men went on with their arduous work, changing their tasks alternately, till they had got the pin as far in as they seemed to desire. But what could the hole be for?

He saw them now close their lamps carefully, and take from their pockets a little packet and a something narrow that seemed to hang, but did not seem to be cord or string. The packet and the pendant were with great precaution placed in the hole; and, it seemed to David, were both

forced in as far as possible, while leaving a good piece of the pendant hanging outside.

David's soul took fright in an instant. His first guess that something serious was about to be done, was confirmed as he saw one of the men move carefully away, while the other began to put a light to the pendant.

He would have cried to them, if only that they might know he was there; but he was suffering, in waking hours, one of those terrible effects which he had known before only in dreams. He felt he would give the world to speak, to move, but his limbs and his voice were alike paralysed by some inexplicable influence.

Suddenly he heard a loud cry of 'Fire!' from the men. He saw a brilliant flame darting along just where floor and wall join, and stop opposite him. In a minute it would explode he thought. He could bear no more. The new terror overpowered the old one. He rose to his feet, drew back the door of ventilation, and fled with the wild cry of a maniac—he knew not, cared not whither.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FUGITIVE.

WITHIN two or three hours it became known everywhere in the neighbourhood of the mine that David Mort, Israel's only son, had been lost in the recesses of the pit, and was supposed to have strayed into some abandoned working, from whence he could not extricate himself, and where in all probability he must have perished speedily from the foul state of the air.

Thus the news reached Mrs. Mort, who rushed frantically to the pit's mouth. Thus the news reached Israel, who had gone into the village, but who, as he went back at a steady pace with the messenger, sternly bade the latter to say nothing to anyone, but that the lad had missed his way, and would be found all right again at his work to-morrow. And thus the news reached, at a still

earlier hour, the night-deputy, Rees Thomas, who was in bed, and had just waked from his first sleep when his landlady came to tell him the news.

Within five minutes Rees Thomas was going at a swift pace towards what he feared was to be the grave of the poor boy ; and he was the first of the important outsiders to reach the pit.

He found Lusty in dreadful trouble. He and certain picked men had vainly ransacked every part that it was at all safe to go into, and he looked as if the case were a thoroughly hopeless one, and that he was chiefly dreading the meeting with Israel.

Taking all possible precautions for his safety, and for the power of enduring for a short time serious difficulties with the air, Rees Thomas simply said,

‘The lad is in the Lord’s hands. It is not as we will, but as He wills. If aught happens to me, remember me kindly to Israel, and ask him to befriend the young maiden whose name I have written here for his son’s sake.’

Then starting for the place where David had

been located for his work, and avoiding the ordinary level, he went from one old and abandoned stall to another, wherever they were not absolutely impervious to the entrance of a boy, till he came to one in which the road descended and passed through shallow water, and where the gas was so bad and dangerous that he felt sure Lusty and his companions had not tried to go through.

Going on all fours, so that he was nearly enveloped by the water, he entered into this valley of the shadow of death, keeping his mouth just above the water, where he knew would be the most air. But he had not advanced above a step or two across the hollow bottom of the declivity before he felt something, which brought with it the instantaneous conviction he had found the lost boy.

His hands told him he could not be mistaken, and his heart told him the lad was gone utterly, unless he had been able to breathe where he lay, which the darkness prevented Rees Thomas from attempting to judge of.

Almost fainting himself, he managed to drag

the helpless body back into the airy level, to look at it by the aid of his lamp, and then he became insensible.

It was, however, but for a few brief moments. He revived, prayed audibly, even while not delaying an instant to attempt to discover if the boy still lived.

‘Ah, yes! the heart beats. He will recover. Thy hand is in this, O Father of mercies! Thou hast said Thy servant Israel shalt yet truly serve Thee.’

Moistening the boy’s lips, and using such other gentle gestures as he remembered to be useful in cases of drowning, for he knew not whether the gas, or the water, or the simple fright had done the chief harm, he soon had the inexpressible happiness to see David’s great blue vacant-looking eyes open, then become filled with a sudden sense of terror awful to look on, and then recognise who it was that bent over him with looks of love. There was a smile, a sob, and a great rush of tears, while he found himself folded to the heart of the good deputy.

By this time Lusty and others had found them;

but Rees Thomas begged them to leave him alone with David for a little while, and he would bring him to the pit's mouth, if they would have all ready for him to ascend. Meanwhile he asked Lusty to go to Israel and his wife, and tell them the lad was safe and coming up.

Lusty went away, and Rees Thomas gave David something to drink which seemed to him quite as good as the nectar of the gods he had so often read about in his school, though he owned afterwards he knew quite well it was only weak tea.

He then ate a few morsels, and was so much better that, by taking the deputy's right arm, he could walk.

'Do you know, Mr. Thomas,' he said, when he was able to speak a little, 'that I don't know how it was, but when I got to the water I felt so strange, and suddenly I seemed to see the sky and all the stars shining so brightly down upon me, and I thought I was in the wood, and then —'

'And then?' kindly guessed the deputy.

'No; I can't tell anything more. I saw the

stars, and then—oh! but it seemed such a time after—I saw your eyes, and I was so confused between them, as to which was which, that ——’

‘ I understand, David. Forget it all, lad, now. It is but a little accident. We mustn’t make too much of such things. I want you to tell me about yourself, and this leaving school, and coming to the mine.’

The poor lad stared a moment at the speaker; it seemed so strange to be asked to relieve his over-burdened soul. Mother, father, everybody, whether pitying him or no, all alike seemed to think it wise to say little about the event to him, and manly in him to say nothing at all.

He revolted against that, and he had found a sympathising listener at last. Little by little Rees Thomas got him to converse freely, and so to tell him all he had been thinking, feeling, and suffering from, through his sudden withdrawal from the school, and the enforced work in the mine.

Rees Thomas listened with the deepest interest to the revelation, until quite moved out of him-

self David could no longer hide the one black cloud that obscured his whole mental world:—

‘ Oh, Mr. Thomas! I am so afraid that—that

——’

‘ What, David? Be afraid of nothing but not telling the truth when it is a friend who listens.’

‘ That I am a wretched coward, and that I shall never be fit for anything in the whole world.’

‘ David, I don’t believe that.’

‘ Oh, it is true! father says so. I didn’t know till he made me do this, and now—oh, I do so wish I was dead? Why did you come to me? I should never have had any more trouble if you hadn’t.’

‘ David, lad, that is wicked talk, or would be if you were in a fit state to guide and judge yourself, but you are not. Come now, trust in me, if only for a little, and let me see if I can’t shape things a bit for you. But we have said enough for the present about these matters. I want to think them well over. But if I do, and work for you as a friend with all my heart, will you promise on your part to be patient and thoughtful?’

‘Oh, yes, I will; I will, indeed—if you think I’m worth caring for.’

‘Worth, my boy? Why it’s as much as the angels can do to calculate the worth of any human soul, even the most ordinary, if only the life that it is to lead be but in harmony with its capacities. But you, David, are, if I mistake not, not one of these merely, but unusually favoured by God. However, that we shall see. I am now going to try to show you the mine in a different aspect.’

Rees Thomas first took him to the stables where no less than forty horses were stalled at night. Some were then in their places, eating as heartily and looking as robust and full of enjoyable life as if the mine was the sole world into which they had been born.

Then they went to a pleasant cosy place near the bottom of the shaft, where many of the colliers were at the moment dining. They sat down with them, entered into conversation with them, and whether it was the influence the deputy exerted over David and them, or the really agreeable chit-chat and banter, mixed at

once with good sense and feeling, that characterised the meal in which David shared, the result was a strange and altogether new lightness of heart that came over the boy, and promptly influenced all his surroundings. He laughed, he jested, and might have grown uproarious, but that he happened to see some of the colliers exchanging significant glances of amusement, and he was at once sobered, and carried back to the grimness of fact.

Rees Thomas noted the change, and took him away by a long rambling gallery till they stopped at a great hole in the wall, a kind of big natural cupboard in an out-of-the-way corner, where the deputy had collected a number of pieces of stone coal, of different shapes, with their surface so beautifully polished, you seemed to see right into them.

David looked at one of these brilliantly reflecting surfaces by the aid of the lamp, and was charmed by the exquisite forms he saw there. Then Rees Thomas explained these were all fossils, found in the mine at different periods, and which by gift or purchase had become his.

He then told David the story of the origin of

coal, of the state of the world at the time, of the state more particularly of his own immediate neighbourhood, and of the things that then lived and grew, examples of which lay before them. All this became to David as one of the most ravishing fairy tales he had ever heard.

‘Is it true? Is it true?’ Such was his question, again and again repeated.

The instrument was tuned at last, and fit for any music that the deputy might have the skill to draw from it. He began in the gentlest way, and using the most simple language, to suggest to David that we can none of us shape the circumstances under which life must begin. We can neither choose our parents, our homes, nor our pecuniary positions; neither can we choose our friends or our future vocation—not, at least, till we begin to gather knowledge, strength, power to see things as they are, and power to so guide ourselves that we may gradually and safely put off the dependent child, and put on the independent man. Fortunate but few are those who can pass at once in boyhood to the preparation for the precise kind of life they desire in manhood to

live. Unhappy are those who have no choice either as boy or man, but must simply accept that which lies next, however unsuitable to their frames, their tastes, their special capabilities, or their natural desires. To the first belong the rich and favoured; to the last the bulk of the labourers here in the mine, as well as in a hundred other departments of industry.

‘Do you feel for these unfortunates?’ he asked.

‘Oh, yes! Will they always be so?’

‘Ah, David! what if I were to say that your life itself may be one of many serious and most important answers to that question?’

‘Mine?’ exclaimed the boy, in undisguised astonishment, yet colouring deeply, as if vaguely conscious of what must be meant.

‘Do you belong to either of the two classes I have spoken of?’

‘Yes, ——’

‘Stop! consider well. Be just to your father, and fear not. Then answer.’

The boy became puzzled, confused; his countenance again began to darken.

‘Suppose now, David, let us only suppose it,

that God has given you powers that are intended for more than your own welfare and enjoyment, but accompanied it with an inexorable condition, that you shall discipline yourself for this service, and the service of your fellow-creatures, by a period of pain, by labours disgusting to you, by humiliations that you kick against, not so much for their own sake as because you believe them to be so unnecessary. Suppose all this, and one, two, three years even pass—longer I believe quite out of the question—would you not think at the end of that time you were well repaid if you had kept your own conscience clear, had conquered your own will, won your father's respect and help, and from that time had only science in all its exactitude, beauty, and beneficence to study, away from here, in London, meeting daily with men whose names burn like lights in the darkness of time. Ah, David, can you doubt, my dear boy, that after all your father is substantially right, that you must obey him, learn practically all he wants you to know, and then, too, you will have acquired by actual experience what experience alone can teach, to

understand these hard-working little-thought-of heroes of ours, who do, without repining, for others what others would not do for them. David, David, the mine is to you your initiation into a holy brotherhood, one in which some day your name shall be never heard but with kindly or grateful recollection.'

The lad's face showed how deeply his whole being was moved. Even where he did not quite understand all that was involved in the speaker's words, he still could sufficiently guess at his meaning.

'Here, David, is the whole thing for you in a nutshell. Tell me, had your father spoken to you as I have done, had he gone differently to work to attain the same end, don't you feel you would have been easy at once, and have forgotten all the horrors of the mine after an hour or two's acquaintance?'

'Yes—I think so—perhaps,' faltered David.

'Had I been your father, were I now Israel Mort thus appealing to you, could you hesitate? do you?'

The deputy paused, and the two gazed earn-

estly, longingly into each other's eyes, then suddenly with a voice broken with emotion, the lad threw himself into the deputy's arms, murmuring,

‘ Help me ! watch me ! and I will do all I can, all you say.’

‘ And all your father says ? ’

‘ Yes.’

And so the compact was sealed.

‘ Mind, David, what I am going to tell you. You don't know your father yet. I don't think anybody knows but God. Sometimes I fancy light has been vouchsafed to me, and that light, David, shows me Israel Mort as a true man, a strong man, a great man. At all events, be to him a son, heed not his harsh words, and time—I promise you *that* at all events, and in any case—will bring you a rich repayment.’

CHAPTER X.

'TWIXT CUP AND LIP.

'HAS Israel Mort come?' asked Mr. Griffith Williams impatiently, the day after the funeral, as he entered through the French window into the sitting-room with an open letter in his hand.

'No, indeed,' said his wife; who, in the very deepest of mourning habiliments, was just then whisking down an unfortunate spider from some dim and hitherto undiscovered crevice with her long feather-headed broom, and at once with her foot putting him out of his pain.

Griffith rang the bell impatiently, and when the maid-servant came bade her look out, and see if Israel was coming.

Then he began to read his letter again, but stopping short, he called out with just a touch

of annoyance in the tone, as if it were an old grievance—

‘Maggy, do stop that ceaseless bustle of spider-hunting, curtain-flapping, and rearranging everything. Such order becomes to me a kind of chaos made tidy;—do stop. Leave all that to your servants, and to fitting times; and sit down here, I have something to say to you.’

She paused a moment—just where she stood with the long feather brush raised high as she could reach to dust the centre ornament on the gilt cornice,—as if trying to understand him; but failing to do so, she completed her job, then sat down near him with a smile on her genial face, and holding the long wand-like handle of the broom stuck upright, like an Amazonian spear turned to domestic use.

He laughed as he saw her attitude, but said with a grave face—

‘Brother Jehoshaphat, it seems, was not content with astonishing people while he lived, but carefully provided a fund of amusement for them when he was dead. I have just received a letter by post from the solicitor of his wife, old Mrs. Jehoshaphat

Williams, to say that after the will made in my favour, as regards the mine, he left another, which has only just been discovered in a secret drawer, expressly referring to and maintaining the first, but saddling me with a charge on the mine in the old woman's favour to the tune of three thousand a year, she having already got all the rest of his property !'

'Griffith ! Griffith !'

'You may well exclaim. But I fear the matter is worse even than it looks, and that in the guise of a friendly gift my brother has deliberately conferred on me a most thankless labour and responsibility.'

'Dear, dear ! Yes, indeed ! Yes, indeed !' reiterated Mrs. Williams, with that rising inflection at the end of the sentence that is so characteristic of the Welsh, and so pretty in its women.

'Here,' continued her husband, 'just read the letter, and see if I have mistaken anything, for it has upset me greatly.'

The obedient wife puts down her weapon, and takes the letter, rather a long one for a lawyer's, as if Mrs. Jehoshaphat Williams had had a finger

in the pie, in having so many details gone into. She puts her left hand determinedly to her forehead while holding out in her right the letter, at some distance, to read: but not long can she go on without interruption, for silence and bodily rest have already sent her mind's eye towards the many subjects that require her domestic care.

As it is her habit, whenever she sees or thinks of a bit of work to be done, to pounce upon it like a bird of prey, no matter how important the task may be that she leaves unfinished, how can she read such long letters, or follow such new and strange thoughts?

This propensity of hers for flying from task to task renders such times of domestic inactivity as the present moments of great care and agitation, for the ghosts of her unfinished works will rise up before her and torment her. Who then can wonder that she gives but a divided attention to Griffith's letter this morning, or to the reflections the letter excites in Griffith's mind, when such a motley and bewildering assemblage perplexes her brain.

'The mine,' he is saying, 'I find, has been

producing about six thousand a year for some years past; so apparently there's three thousand a piece for us, and the burden of management upon me alone. Well; perhaps that's not unfair. But what do you say to this, Maggy? Israel Mort has been at Barrett repeatedly about the bad state of the mine, and the other day he came to me, even at the risk of Barrett's sending him adrift. And what do you think he said? Why that Jehoshaphat has so worked the mine—taking everything he could get out of it, and putting nothing he could help into it—that his motto must have been the same as that of the famous Prince Metternich—"After me the deluge!"

Seeing his wife's eyes already begin to wander, he rose and paced up and down the room, speaking now to himself, now to her, while her thoughts, however much she strives to detain them, are again far away. Now they penetrate below the crack in the floor, right down into the clean, darkish cellar; where, on a table, in their white cotton clothes, lie hams and fitches of bacon waiting to be salted, and ribs and loins and trotters to be wrapped up and sent to neighbours

who have bespoken them, or, in special cases, as gifts.

‘Don’t you see, Maggy, my position? I have all the repairs, however elaborate or costly, to make.’

‘Yes, indeed! It’s a shame, Griffith.’

‘So that if I have to spend the entire income for a year—a year, do I say? perhaps for many years—her three thousand must go on being paid!’

‘But Griffith, she can’t live long, you know. No, indeed.’

‘And then it may be worse—for it is not a mere life interest, but a permanent charge, which she can and will leave to others. She may be reasonable, and inclined to help; but a stranger will of course stick to his bargain, and ask me if I am a rogue if I propose to modify it.’

Mrs. Williams sees not only the truth and force of all this, but manages at the same time to see besides, that there is a tap half driven into a beer barrel:—that there is a dish of freshly-churned butter set down on the stones, within reach of the cat;—that there is a pan of heaving and crackling

dough at the kitchen fire :—The vivid imagination can bear no more. She rises hastily, says :—

‘Griffith, excuse me just a minute,’ and disappears, to return no more till her husband has, as usual, forgotten her absence, and found new avocations elsewhere. That was easy now. For Israel’s face appeared for a moment at the window, as he crossed and looked in, but was going on to enter more humbly by the door.

‘Come in here ! Come in !’ cried Griffith aloud. Israel pushed open the glass door and stepped in, greeted by the words,—

‘Have you heard the news?’

For a moment Israel did not look up. It was a way with him, that of looking on the ground, when pondering in thought, or when expecting critical questions.

Slowly at last he raised his head, and looking impassive as a piece of ice, said—

‘To what, sir, do you refer?’

‘My brother’s new will.’

‘Just discovered?’

‘Yes. Giving his wife three thousand a year as a charge on the mine.’

Israel's eyes again sought the ground, as if he could always at need there recruit his mental forces ; then turning them steadily on Griffith, he said :—

‘ Well, sir, I will tell you. I signed that will, I and a comrade brought by me, as witnesses, at Mr. Jehoshaphat's request, for he had rather a respect for me, even though he didn't choose to promote me.’

‘ You signed it ! you, Israel ! you astonish me ; and did he tell you what you were signing ?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ And you did not remonstrate, not say one word of the monstrous injustice of saddling me with all the dangers, expenses, and responsibilities, while probably giving to her the bulk of all the earnings ?’

‘ How could I, Mr. Griffith ? I am but an Overman, as Mr. Jehoshaphat once was. But he had become a great man, I remained a little one, little and insignificant as when we first knew each other. It was for him to say, “ Israel, do this,” and for me to obey.’

‘ And why did you not tell me before ?’

'Because he bade me hold my tongue till the lawyer had said his say.'

There is no need to pursue the dialogue. It ended once more to Israel's advantage, and in an increased desire on Griffith's part for the meeting in the mine, fixed for the morrow.

Meantime, Mrs. Williams' first business was to discover what her 'lazy, loitering lasses,' the servants, were about; so she went round through the little court, with its old, picturesque, ivy-clad walls, that surrounded the kitchen and other offices, and began to call in a shrill voice for 'Ruth' and 'Gwen,' but called in vain; so hurried on to the kitchen door, prepared for any amount of domestic calamity.

At the threshold she was met by Nest in tears; and the moment the poor child saw her she ran to her and clasped her, and hid her face in her dress as if her heart would break with the distress that was too great for her to explain.

With some effort Mrs. Williams extracted the truth. Nest had just seen David—had met him

quite accidentally—and been so frightened at his looks and his hideous miner-dress, that she could not venture to speak to him. But then he had come after her, and told her all his dreadful story about his first day in the mine, and how kind to him Rees Thomas had been, and how he meant to try again.

‘I sat down and cried I can’t tell you how long. And then he seemed sorry he had told me, and said his father called him a mean coward, and he supposed he was one, or he should never have told me. And then he saw his father coming, and he went away, and never even wished me good-bye.’

Mrs. Williams loved her child and knew how to comfort her, and did so now, and brought back all her bright gaiety at last by explaining to her Israel’s improved position, and by promising to see what could be done for David’s future.

And then Nest prattled on, just like a bird in the early morning, as if it mattered nothing what was said, when the saying was so sweet, and then—

Why then Mrs. Williams, while reluctant to put away the child, sees once more in her excited fancy the beer spiriting from the tap, the cat cooling her tongue in the fresh butter, the dough rising to unheard-of heights; she also sees in the same way Jenkyn, the farm servant, coming for his coat, from which she had cut a sleeve, and only half finished putting it in again; sees strange dogs prowling about the cellar where she has left her hams, and fitches, and ribs, and trotters unprotected.

At these and a host of other disturbing visions Mrs. Williams presses her feet together, kisses Nest, bids her run and play, and herself rushes off to examine into the actual state of things.

CHAPTER XI.

GRIFFITH WILLIAMS AND ISRAEL TAKE COUNSEL
TOGETHER IN THE MINE.

THE day of the appointment for a meeting in the mine having come, Mr. Griffith Williams dressed himself with some care, conscious of the eyes that were to look, many for the first time, on their new employer. He had forgotten for the moment the sort of place he was going through, and the contact his clothes would have to endure.

When Mrs. Williams reminded him of this at their very early breakfast, he said carelessly,—

‘Israel will see to all that, no doubt.’

‘Griffith dear, don’t forget to say a kind word to Israel about David. *Now* he must do something better for him.’

‘He ought, at all events; but Israel’s a man difficult to deal with in things that he considers as

belonging not to an employer's province, but his own. As manager, I may tell you, Maggy, I have immense faith in him, and expect great things from him. It wasn't merely what he said and did that influenced me the other day to put him so suddenly in Barrett's place, but from a boy I have known him, and have always had the same idea of him. He's not a pleasant man, but a man of real worth to those who know how to use him. My brother acted brutishly to Israel. He knew his abilities, and profited by them, just so far as it suited his convenience, but hindered him from getting one step higher, lest he might either get too strong a hold and make himself too valuable, or go elsewhere, and become as great a man as himself. What's the time? Half-past five! What a dark, gloomy morning! I must make haste, or I shall be setting a bad example at the outset. Don't you know,' he said with a laugh, as he kissed and parted with his wife, 'I am now one of the captains of industry, and must mind my p's and q's?'

As he approached the ugly group of buildings that surrounded the pit's mouth, he saw Israel

standing there to watch the colliers descend; and Griffith thought that as no one had yet noticed him, he would slip into a dark corner, and similarly watch Israel's own behaviour under his new dignity.

The news of the Overman's elevation had rapidly flown, and it was amusing to see the differing attitudes of the colliers as they recognised him.

One man seemed almost inclined to kneel in reverence for Israel's condescension in wishing him 'Good morning,' till Israel's dry question, 'Drinking last night?' caused him to collect himself, and hurry into the cage, followed by a laugh from his comrades.

Another turned full face upon Israel, as he said—

'It's a fine thing to be in luck, Master Israel. Luck's a very fine thing, ain't it?'

'Give me time to try, lad,' said Israel quietly, and without offence.

When the last of the working colliers had gone down, the night-deputy came up from below, and seeing Israel, went to him and held out his hand.

Just for a brief space Israel delayed to take it, but then the two hands met, and seemingly a cordial grasp was given.

The deputy was a man whom the most indifferent person could scarcely pass without noticing, for the unearthly blaze of the eye; which shone out of the cadaverous, murky face like an unnaturally beautiful star during some portentous aspect of the heavens. He was of small, spare form, and sharp, thin features. These were inexpressibly sad, yet with a kind of darkened radiance upon them, as though their natural light were under some partial and inexplicable eclipse.

It was a face where, in the profound tenderness of the gloom, in the great hollows under the eyes, in the sharp extremities of the nose and chin, and in the shrunken yet sensitive nostrils, Death's fingers might have recently passed; but with a touch so stricken, kindly, and hesitating, that at last he spared him to live on; without, however, removing from that wan, worn countenance the signs of the fatal sentence he had visibly stamped there in token it was but a reprieve after all he accorded.

The same kind of effect was produced by the contrast between the powerful expression of the head, and the thin, skeleton-like frame; which looked in the bulky clothes as if raised from some graveyard and reanimated, either to benefit the owner by some new period in which to expiate sin, or because his previous life had been too valuable to be prematurely lost to his fellow-creatures.

While engaged in his duties he was calm, collected, and thoroughly efficient; but when alone, and he was able to retire into the mental solitude he so much loved, his lips would be seen moving incessantly in silent communion with his own inner self.

Such was the man who had aided David in the mine, and who now addressed Israel:—

‘I congratulate thee, Manager Mort,’ he said, after a prolonged pause, during which he looked searchingly and wistfully into Israel’s face.

‘I congratulate *thee*, Overman Rees Thomas,’ was the reply, with just sufficient emphasis on the word Overman to indicate the new dignity.

The slightest tinge of colour seemed to appear

on the pale, hollow cheek, as Rees Thomas spake again—

‘If thou sayest that seriously I thank thee; and shall try, with the Lord’s help, to do my duty; but if thou madest the mistake of supposing I was seeking my own advancement and vain-glory when I offered my congratulations, thou didst me wrong. No, friend Israel, I was yearning after better things.’

‘Which some day thou shalt talk to me about once more.’

‘Again thou mistakest. It is not thyself of whom I speak, but of these benighted creatures here below our feet. Israel Mort, dost thou recognise the hand that has done this for thee? Dost thou thank the Lord? Art thou determined to make this, the greatest event in thy life, redound to His glory and honour, rather than to thine own?’

‘Rees Thomas, I am not given to so much talk. Do you accept the post of Overman?’

‘Do you withdraw your objections to my holding the men together for prayers at the beginning of the day’s toil; they shall be brief—

ay, brief as may be the lives of every one of us, which we cannot depend upon for an hour?’

‘I have said No a dozen times, have I not? Again I say No!’

The speaker’s voice was harsh, and the tone expressed the sense of habitual soreness on the subject.

‘Then I refuse. My sin of complicity is great enough already. I will undertake no higher responsibilities to make my neglect of His message more criminal.’

Israel paused a moment to restrain his ire, for he knew no man whose value he could for a moment think of as equal in comparison with Rees Thomas’s. And even then, as the latter was getting into the cage to descend again, on account of the employer’s visit, he could not but let the words escape him—

‘Remember, if I have to find a new Overman, he may ask me to let him choose a new deputy.’

‘He may ; and if he does, you will displace me. It is well. Perhaps it is to that God is guiding me. Useless, here, I may——’ At that moment the signal was given, the cage descended, and the two men were abruptly separated.

Pondering over this conversation, in which he had been deeply interested, Griffith did not care for the moment to comment upon it to Israel.

Moving, therefore, slowly round some of the buildings, he presented himself from a different point to the new manager, and shook him by the hand.

Israel's eye at once glanced at his employer's dress. Then he strode away to a little office, asking Griffith to follow him. Here the silk hat was exchanged for one of leather, stiffened, so it seemed, with centuries of dirt and perspiration; over his blue frock he put on an old waterproof with sleeves; and lastly, he exchanged his own boots for a pair such as he had never before even dimly conceived the possibility of, so ludicrously clumsy and shapeless were they.

Israel, however, saw nothing in the transformation but its necessity, and could but vaguely understand the practical jest which so tickled Griffith. Israel was in no ordinary sense of the word a humorous man.

The mirthful mood of Griffith was to undergo

a great change as the cage would bear him down, and he begin to realise that dim, awful mystery, the depth and darkness of the earth as laid bare in the greater mines.

They moved on to the pit mouth. There Griffith found an empty tram waiting for him, lined throughout with canvas, to defend him from touching the dirty inside; and with a roll of canvas for him to sit on.

But though this attention to his comfort did not escape Griffith's pleased eye, he was much more, and unpleasantly, impressed with the cage into which he was to go. It seemed to him actually too low even to sit in upright.

It was a solid iron cage in three stages, so that three trams full of coal could be brought up at once, or three batches of men or materials sent down. Griffith found on enquiry this was the only mode for ascent and descent in the mine; and he felt strongly inclined to remonstrate on the unseemliness of it as regards the men, and its extreme unsuitability in cases of accidents when wounded and dying persons might have to be brought up. He restrained himself, however, and

got in, helped by Israel and a couple of colliers, who fairly lifted him over the tram edge.

‘Sit down, sir,’ said Israel. ‘Lower! Still lower! You really must incline your head a little more down. That will do. Now, please, don’t move!’

He did not, but the tram did; being pushed forward into the lowermost compartment of the iron cage; the roof of which seemed, by a well-known optical delusion, to slide over and shut him as in a trap—only a few inches above his face, and his painfully huddled-up form.

This, with the sudden darkness, and the apparent absence of all air, excited so great a sense of oppression, of difficult breathing, of danger through suffocation, that he almost decided to tell Israel to stop, and refuse to go down, until he could do so by some less alarming mode. But while he hesitated about the unmanliness of it, and the loss of caste it might bring him, the hammer was heard giving the signal, and the cage began to descend; slower than usual on account of Israel’s considerateness for his employer.

The moment Griffith perceived this he almost cursed his manager’s kindness, for he felt growing

worse every instant, and could only hope to reach the bottom with the least possible delay, and there find the air he now prayed for as for dear life.

He had no organic disease, but there were elements of disorder in his frame, that rendered him peculiarly liable to physical suffering—perhaps physical danger from the position he was in.

To amuse him Israel told him brief anecdotes of his own and his fellows' history regarding accidents in the shaft; finishing with a bit of statistics showing how large a proportion of all mining calamities occur in the shaft, or connected with it, especially in the going up and down.

But Griffith heard nothing he said. He was feeling each instant that he should never reach the bottom without fainting, and what that might involve under such circumstances he could not but foresee. But he kept silent, knowing that no earthly power could shorten the ordeal for him. He now only thought of death—of things that should have been attended to, but had not been; of his wife and children and dependents; and then waited, conscious it was simply now a race between the cage downwards to possible safety,

and the deleterious power that seemed bent on destroying him before he could touch the bottom, and hope at least for relief.

Will he ever forget the moment when it did stop; and that other moment when the tram having been pushed away from the cage, he found himself again where he could breathe, sit up, stand, see dimly; and above all, feel the delicious life-giving breeze that came sweeping over and by him?

He told his wife afterwards that, ludicrous as the narrative then seemed to him if he viewed it as others must do, he would not, as regards himself, again risk it for the entire value of the mine.

When he was calm enough to look back on the cage, he could hardly help wondering that he should have been such an ass as to get into the tram, which naturally excluded all air except such infinitesimal portions as might come in over the edge between that and the cage roof; whereas if he had gone down, standing as the colliers did, bending low within the open cage, he would at all events have had air, and been spared the hideous yet half grotesque suffering he had gone through.

Israel no doubt had meant all for the best; so Griffith simply told him, as if he wanted to test and try all things to-day, he would go up in the usual way. When he did so at the close of his visit, he experienced no inconvenience of the kind that had so alarmed him.

His uncomfortable thoughts and feelings soon passed away, as the danger of the descent, which had been a very real one, passed too; and his spirits rose as he remembered how carefully he had kept himself from any the least outward sign of affright.

As the cage rested at the bottom he was handed out by Israel. At first he was confused by the noise of the pumps, by the little twinkling lights, by the gleams on the water pit, or sump, and by the sharp rush of the air about him, moved by artificial force.

Then, as he grew used to the place he heard peculiar sounds; and going on a little, and turning, he saw in a rudely dug out arched recess of the rock the dim forms of a number of colliers standing bare-headed in a reverential attitude, candles

or lamps in hand, and Rees Thomas reading from a Bible with great fervour.

Griffith glanced round enquiringly at Israel, who stood silent, grim, but took no notice of his employer's gesture.

‘He has disobeyed you,’ whispered Griffith.

‘And not for the first time,’ was the stern reply. ‘But it shall be for the last!’

‘So’—thought Griffith to himself—‘he means to be master here of those under him, and gives me a hint at the same time to that effect.’

He was wise enough, however, to understand the worthlessness of responsibility without power, and his only remark came in the shape of a question:—

‘Why do you object to this?’ he asked in a low tone.

‘Because it sets men thinking, and fills their hearts with vain imaginings. The best and happiest miner is he who thinks of nothing but how to win coal while in the mine, and of nothing but how best to forget it altogether when out of the mine.’

‘I'd let him alone.’

‘That man, an officer, has disobeyed positive orders.’

‘Oblige me by saying nothing to him about it at present, or till we have talked the matter over.’

After a pause, Israel said, dryly, ‘Very well.’ Then he added, as with prudent afterthought—

‘We tried it once for nearly two years, in order to please a lot of fanatics, but were obliged to give it up through the rows that broke out between them who did like it, and the hauliers who didn’t.’

‘Hush!’ ejaculated Griffith, as, the reading finished, the party began to sing with touching homeliness and fervour the hymn which has for its first line—

‘For a rock to build on.’

Then an aged grey-haired man began to pray. His accents were feeble, but the spirit in his soul made them penetrate far into the dim recesses around.

A younger collier, his son, succeeded; one who had but lately joined the ‘praying lot,’ as irreverent colliers called them. It was most touching to watch the face of the old collier as he listened for the first time in his life to the earnest,

rough but manly tones and words in which his son addressed others, using his own discreditable experience in candid confession for their common benefit. The grimy tears were rolling down his face as the son finished.

A third prayer followed—they were all brief—and then they sang a second hymn, and the service was over ; lasting a little more than twenty minutes.

As they separated and went each away to his arduous and dangerous labour, Griffith could not but ask himself which of these two classes—the men who had a real abiding faith in something higher than themselves, something nobler than this world, or the men who had it not—were the likeliest to be the best workmen, the best citizens, the best husbands, sons and fathers ; and so asking, felt no sort of doubt about the answer.

That morning's service then, in which he had been deeply interested, should be another of the various matters he reserved for the present to go into at a later day with Israel, when he felt he could more gracefully and more wisely interfere.

When the men had dispersed, Rees Thomas was

seen to be waiting within sight of the two persons on whom his future so much depended, as if to say to them, 'Here I am if you want me;' but as they made no sign, he went away through that same low black arch through which the general current of collier life had gone before him, and which reminded Griffith of the famous line from Dante—'Abandon hope, all ye who enter here!'

A moment after he was angry at his own thought; it seemed so unpleasantly—so inconveniently suggestive. He felt as guilty as a king caught in the act of teaching his subjects disloyalty.

While he followed Israel step by step through the main level, or central way, he could but smile at his own anticipations, which had been of something more than discomfort. It was not a pleasant place to choose for a promenade certainly, for he had to keep up a perpetual series of difficult strides from sleeper to sleeper, as the timbers crossed between the rails of the tramway, or to walk with easier steps in some inches of water which was flowing outwards from the recesses of the mine; while in constant danger (if he moved in an up-

right posture) of knocking his head against some irregular beam of wood placed for the support of the roof where the natural rock was giving way.

Then, too, when the signal was given of trams coming he had to huddle away his somewhat luxuriant growth of person in a miserable little refuge hole at the side, and there crouch and shrink as the train went past with its seemingly interminable trams.

But when, proud of his own equanimity during this preliminary experience, he began to reason as against an imaginary antagonist, that after all the disagreeables of mining had been absurdly exaggerated, he was quickly brought to silence by Israel's leaving this central level to go through the side ones—'stalls,' as he called them—each of which led, sometimes through long distances, and by ways that seemed to become more and more low, and narrow, and stifling, to the face of the coal, where the miners were actually at work.

All these roads had been, as Israel explained, excavated through the coal; and the walls, or 'pillars,' were masses of coal, still left for support between the stalls for the roadways.

‘ And you see, sir,’ remarked Israel, ‘ that as the vein of coal is but shallow, when we have got that, we don’t care to go on digging at the useless rocks merely to give us grand approaches.’

Griffith saw the force of the logic without exactly appreciating it ; for he was now, and had been for some time, not walking, but plunging along head foremost, his back painfully bent, yet never for one instant getting a chance of relief by an upright posture, his feet slipping now into pools of water, now into black greasy sludge, his head experiencing one incessant series of shocks, which no past experience could guard him from while having to move on so fast after Israel, who alarmed him terribly with the fear of being left behind. And, indeed, this did happen just for a minute or two when Israel left him without warning alone in the dark ; and he felt like a fly drawn by some irresistible and hideous attraction along one of the lines of the web of a gigantic underground spider squatted in some unknown centre, from which all these levels seemed to radiate.

The darkness was horrible to him. He would

have been obliged to shout loudly to Israel, had the latter delayed his return much longer. But he came, and explained that he had been desirous to ascertain if the district they were approaching, and which contained the only dangerous workings, were as safe and pure as they had been when he visited the spot a few hours before. He had, he said, found a little gas, and cleared it away; and now Griffith might be perfectly satisfied there was no danger of his going on.

Griffith thought on the whole he was tired, and had seen enough. He could visit the mine again. Of course, he should do so; perhaps frequently—that was his duty. Couldn't they rest somewhere? He really must sit down, since he could not stand up; his back felt broken.

Israel was remorseless. There were other stalls he must see—one, at all events.

Griffith consented to the one.

Presently they stopped before a door, which was opened by a pull from some unseen hand down in the dark corner by the side.

Griffith held forth his lamp to see who was

there, and beheld a little fellow huddled up, cord in hand, a picture of the saddest, blankest, most hopeless-looking misery he had ever seen.

In the dark—hour after hour—no light permitted, and nothing, therefore, to read; and as to thoughts, God help the poor little creatures to keep thoughts away from them which, for a time at least, suggest nothing but explosions, burns, ‘lamings,’ if they don’t bring things even more terrible still—the ghosts of dead men or boys they have known, and who have been killed in the mine.

Something else—though for the moment what it was Griffith did not know—induced him again to look at the little fellow, whose white eyes glared spectre-like out of the dusky face and hair. Then, hearing the call of Israel, who waited for him, he passed on with a sigh, and the mental remark, ‘This, too, Master Israel, shall be seen about by-and-by, or I will know the reason.’

When he came up to the Overman he said, though merely for the sake of saying something to cover his delay, and the thoughts excited by the fate of such poor lads,—

‘Do you know, Israel, I fancy I have seen that boy somewhere; how wretched he looks!’

‘He’ll get used to that. And as to your seeing him—why, it’s David.’

‘Good God, Israel, you don’t say so. I must go back and speak to him, if but for a moment.’

‘I beg you, sir, to do nothing of the kind,’ said Israel, arresting his arm with no very gentle touch. ‘He’s quiet now—to excite him again would be cruel and *useless*.’

‘And do you really mean him to go through all this?’ asked Griffith, in undisguised astonishment.

‘Why not? I did! and without his advantages. I had nothing to hope for; he has everything.’

‘But what is your aim?’

‘To larn him to be a man—a strong man—one who, having first been master of himself, and got to know, shall then use his mastery and his knowledge to go further and higher than I can.’

‘You surprise me! You——.’ He was interrupted.

‘Shall we go on, sir? As I said, ’tis but one place more.’

‘I suppose so,’ responded Griffith wearily.

And bitterly he reproached himself for his folly when he found the way get still narrower, lower, and more disgustingly foul with the black slimy mud, so that at last he had to lie down and wriggle his body over some foul rubbish that had lately fallen from the roof and broken a man’s arm. It was an arduous and loathsome task that had to be got through before he could reach the place where Israel already was, and waiting for him.

Whether his new manager had any secret aim in thus disgusting him with the actual details of mining life, Griffith had not yet formally asked himself; even while he felt that if Israel did seek to achieve in that way a certain independence in his future schemes of labour, he had already succeeded.

‘These falls of roof, Israel, are awkward things!’

‘Yes, they cost a deal of money.’

‘I didn’t mean that. I mean the injury to life. But I suppose the danger looks worse than it is.’

‘On the contrary, the danger is far greater than it looks,’ said Israel. ‘Out of a thousand lives

lost yearly in the United Kingdom, between four and five hundred are due to falls.'

'Is it possible!'

'A fall might even now take place, and on so large a scale as to stop our return for ever—at least alive.'

It was well that Israel could not just then see Griffith Williams's face, even though he—perhaps accidentally—held up his lamp towards it.

Griffith restrained his tongue determinedly. He was there, and must not lose caste with his servant, and that servant Israel Mort; but he mentally resolved that only some most pressing occasion should ever take him again where he was.

Presently he had a great relief. Israel led him to a gob, or receptacle for the rubbish, chiefly loose stones that accumulate in working. There he could lie down and stretch his aching limbs, and take any posture he liked, except the upright one; for in all other directions there was plenty of room.

Sitting or reclining in the hollow face of the gob, with a fresh breezy air playing about him, and luxuriating in the secret consciousness that a

most unpleasant task was now fairly got over, he recovered his natural geniality.

‘ May I smoke ? ’

‘ No. Against the rules. ’

‘ Is it just now dangerous ? ’

‘ No. ’

‘ If I do smoke ? ’

‘ You’ll be fined. ’

‘ And the fines go to—— ’

‘ The colliers’ benefit fund. ’

‘ Why, then, it’s an eminently patriotic act to do. ’

He pulled out his cigar-case, and offered a cigar to Israel.

‘ Do you absolutely persist in spite of my warning ? ’ asked Israel seriously.

‘ Don’t you see ? The thing’s done — irrevocable. ’

A puff of smoke passed towards Israel’s face.

‘ Very well. I shall record the facts in my book. ’ And he began to write.

‘ Do, and add that, seeing no further harm could possibly happen through your participation, you had to levy two fines instead of one. ’

A grim smile broke out on Israel's face, and soon broadened into a hoarse laugh, the only way he could laugh, as he took the proffered cigar, and followed the example set him.

They continued to smoke for some time in silence.

'Well now, Israel, give me some idea of what must be done. What are these colossal undertakings you dimly foreshadow as likely to turn me into a new Cræsus?'

'A second shaft.'

Griffith groaned in spirit, and sighed aloud.

'Go on,' he said.

'Some thousands of new fir props must be obtained and put up to make the levels even decently safe.'

'Costly job,' said Griffith, looking grave. 'Really necessary?'

'A knife cuts into them like cheese in many places.'

'Proceed.'

'Then the engine boilers are so worn as to be dangerous; the spears of the pumping apparatus should be replaced; and there are many other less

important but still serious things to be attended to——’

‘Costing money?’

‘Yes.’

‘In fact, Israel, you are preparing me—mildly—for going to work to make what shall be equivalent to an entirely new plant—eh?’

‘Something like that, I own.’

‘Quite out of the question. Quite. So if that’s all the prospect——’

‘Wishing no harm to you, Mr. Griffith, I do wish it might be in effect a new plant, as that would admit of so many improvements, so much greater economy in winning the coal, and increase so immensely the annual production of the mine.’

‘Would it?’ asked Griffith earnestly, again lending himself to the thought inspired by Israel’s unmistakable earnestness and faith; and half inclining to consider how capital might be raised to do the job once for all in a masterly style.

Israel did not directly answer this query.

‘Do you know, sir,’ he said, ‘that the land in which this mine lies was offered to an ancestor of mine in exchange for a cow?’

‘And of course he accepted?’

‘No; the innocent declined.’ The depth of scorn with which Israel pronounced the word innocent was something to remember.

‘Surely that was never *your* ancestor?’ said Griffith, with unconcealed irony.

‘If he wasn’t, he ought to have been, in accord with marriage law,’ said Israel, and then went on. ‘Well, sir, as is the difference between the value of that piece of waste land in the last century and now, so is the value of your mine as it is, and as what it might be.’

‘Are you serious? Do you know or weigh what you say? Stop, I entreat you, and think.’ Griffith’s voice trembled, his hands were damp with perspiration, he was evidently losing his self-control.

‘I say what I say, and know what I know,’ thundered Israel, yielding to the contagion of Griffith’s excitement; and feeling the dramatic instinct, that is so strong in the hearts of us all, put him into artistic sympathy with his employer.

They talked on after that a long while, and with increasing respect in Griffith Williams’s mind for

the knowledge and efficiency of his new manager, and with increasing faith in his previsions of the future goal to be reached ; but also with a certain undercurrent of dissatisfaction at Israel's utter disregard of and recklessness about the more humane, religious, and philanthropic aspects of mining affairs, which Griffith thought much of in connection with certain projects for the comfort and elevation and security of the workmen.

He tried to discuss them with Israel, but the latter exhibited his contempt for the subject so nakedly and so promptly, that Griffith found it difficult afterwards to go on and explain himself, and so for the moment let the question drop.

The sums required, too, were very large for a man of Griffith's means, even if only reparation—but sufficient reparation—were decided on ; but hopelessly beyond him if the dead works and machinery were to be made equivalent to those of a new plant.

Buoyant with hope, yet burdened with the fear of an overwhelming expenditure ; desirous to be a real captain of industry, one who acknowledged duties as well as claimed profits, and at the same

time afraid that Israel Mort would in that way be as a perpetual thorn festering in his side ; loathing the actual mine as seen with his bodily eyes, but finding entrancing beauties and delights in it when seen only through the spirit's vision of the fruits, Griffith Williams went home that day to find everything about him already undergoing a change ;—his rooms looked low—little—mean ; his furniture shabby ; his servants vulgar ; his wife—well, he loved her, but he must—he would—say, and with as little of bitterness as possible, she looked and moved, and spoke more ‘ *domesticated* ’ than ever.

He wandered about all the rest of the day on the mountains, stopping occasionally to lie down on the slope and fill page after page of his notebook with figures. Then he would go on again, as if possessed by an unquiet spirit ; till feeling his fatigue alike of body and mind, he would throw himself at full length upon a pleasant moss-covered spot on the banks of the little stream, and ask himself in tribulation of spirit whether he was not endangering by such speculations the good he possessed and the peace that he yet might possess

if he would but discipline and attune his spirit properly, rather than enhancing the good or the peace by the creation of the wealth he already saw within his grasp.

The night he spent was certainly not one of sleep, or rest, or comfort, or happiness. Whether it was a night profitably spent may be better judged when Israel and he shall meet again as appointed, with full details before them of all the manager proposes.

CHAPTER XII.

SHOWING HOW ISRAEL HELPED MR. GRIFFITH TO
A DECISION.

IF the woman who hesitates is lost, the man who hesitates is often saved.

Griffith Williams had in him an instinct of caution, which formed a valuable counterbalance to his impulsiveness and constant desire to relieve the tedium of existence by change.

He and Israel laboured, day by day, week by week, through estimates, and proposals, and histories of other successful collieries; and thus seemed to get nearer and nearer to that state of satisfaction which springs from an exhaustive enquiry.

But Israel himself, as a man, did not win upon him as did Israel's general scheme.

Strange to say, one element of this result was a half fancy, almost a definite suspicion, that Israel reciprocated the personal want of sympathy.

This annoyed Griffith. It seemed at once so humiliating and so grotesquely absurd.

He tried to convince himself he was mistaken ; but the only result was confirmation of his dislike, and belief in Israel's dislike, to which he thought he found the key-note in a little incident that occurred.

They had been discussing the character of a conspicuous man of the neighbourhood, and Griffith, perhaps with a certain desire to talk at Israel, had been praising his balanced mind, his habit of looking at both sides of a question, and deliberating calmly while others were urging him to immediate action, when Mort interrupted him :—

‘ Yes, he deliberates so long, that when he decides he finds his chance gone, and his decision no longer worth twopence. I spit at such men. Always half-and-half in everything—and no two of his halves making a whole. A man who'll never do any good for himself nor anybody else.’

‘You are severe,’ said Griffith, colouring in spite of his effort to seem indifferent.

‘I mean it,’ retorted Israel, who was in a bad humour that day at finding no progress made.

What did, what could Israel want? Griffith asked himself seriously. Did this look like expectation of the acceptance of his schemes? He was bound to say, no.

What, then, could Israel be thinking of? Did he want him to sell the mine? Or did he want to be discharged? Had he lost, in a word, faith in his new master, much more rapidly and decisively than his new master in him, and was he pondering new schemes?

About this time a terrible explosion took place in a neighbouring colliery, and for weeks together the whole neighbourhood was full of lamentation for the killed and wounded, who in numbers almost equalled that of a small battle-field. The villages were blackened with funeral processions; charges of the most painful, and some of the most sinister character, were rumoured about as to the causes of the accident, till Griffith, who followed all the details with an irresistible but most de-

pressing fascination, felt that he would not for the world occupy the position of the unfortunate owners.

Precisely at that moment Israel began to press upon him the absolute necessity of heavy and immediate outlay, if he would guard his own mine and his own people from a similar calamity.

No time could be worse. Griffith had just satisfied himself that between philanthropy and profit (such profit as alone attracted him) there was no common ground, but that one must be chosen and the other left. Need we then wonder that Griffith was wearied out with his importunity, and told him so.

When three months had been spent in this shilly-shally fashion, Israel came one morning at a much earlier hour than was usual with him, to see his employer; and, as Griffith guessed, to worry him with the old subject. As he noticed the more than ordinarily hard, rigid, expressionless character of his manager's face, he could not but satirically say to himself, 'There's something up! That's the way and the only way in which Israel's

face tells tales—it is so determined to say nothing.’

Pleased with his jest, however, he thought no more of what might be the tales that Israel’s face thus told, if any, but addressed himself to his own thoughts and objects, which had now at last become pretty well defined. Quite suddenly, and as though the thought had but just then occurred for the first time, he put a question :—

‘Israel, if I were inclined to sell, do you think you could get me a purchaser?’

Israel stared in his employer’s face, and seemed so veritably surprised, that Griffith grew half ashamed of his little trick of testing by an abrupt question whether his manager had or had not already got such a thought in his brain.

‘You are surprised, I see. And you have a right to be so. But the fact is, my conscience and my thirst for gain find they can’t pull satisfactorily together; so as a Christian, you know, I am bound to choose the better part. What say you? Should not one’s faith and one’s will go together?’

‘He’s a poor creature that doubts it,’ drily responded Israel. ‘I didn’t know before they were two things—they arn’t with me.’

‘Well,’ said Griffith, after a disagreeable pause, ‘will you try to find me a customer? You know more about the mine than I do.’

‘What price?’

‘What say you to thirty thousand pounds?’

Israel gave vent to an exclamation—then with an eloquent gesture of his hands, without saying one word, made Griffith so heartily ashamed of his proposal that he was embarrassed to proceed.

After an awkward silence, Israel said—

‘Seeing the old woman’s interest, which must be first satisfied—seeing the lot of capital that must be put into the mine, before much more coal can be taken out, would you, rather than let a customer go, take half, that is, fifteen thousand?’

‘Pooh! You are jesting!’

‘I say, sir, would you rather lose a customer than take fifteen thousand?’

‘Really, what a positive fellow you are. How you stick to a thing when you have said it. Say sixteen!’

‘Fifteen thousand pounds!’ doggedly repeated Israel. ‘Will you take that?’

‘Yes,’ said Griffith, with a sigh as of relief, that he had at last decided something. ‘Yes, I think I would if I can get no more, but you must fight for at least twenty thousand.’

‘I am but a new man at managing and agency, and must expect to be dubiously looked on by great folk, capitalists, and colliery owners, if I go on such a business without authority; in fact, I might do damage, but couldn’t do good.’

‘That’s true. What do you wish?’

‘Whatever’s best for the job.’

Both the men after this were silent for a minute or two, deliberating;—perhaps waiting each for the other to begin again.

At last the impulsive man could be still no longer:—

‘You seem very cautious all of a sudden,’ he remarked to Israel.

‘A man’s character may be hurt by things like this, unless he goes safe guarded. You ask me if can find a purchaser. I say, however difficult the job, one can but try.’

Then came another pause, and the two scanned each other's face furtively, until their glances met, and Griffith laughed outright.

Then he began to write in his note-book, to rub out, and re-write, until finally he satisfied himself.

'What if I give you something like this?' he said, and he read aloud the following letter:—

'Dear Sir,—I am so utterly inexperienced in colliery management, and so unwilling to embark in it, without clearer light than I at present possess, that I shall be glad if you can find a purchaser at a fair price.' 'Will that do?'

'Yes, for one letter, the one to be shown. But I shall want another giving me authority to sell, and fixing the lowest price.'

Again Griffith wrote, and afterwards read aloud:—

'Dear Sir,—If you can obtain for me—'

'Less commission of five per cent.,' interposed Israel, as if that were the most matter-of-fact thing in the world.

Griffith raised his eyebrows, but inserted the words, and then again read:—

‘If you can obtain for me, less commission of five per cent. for yourself, fifteen thousand pounds, I will accept, and so settle the matter.’

Israel begged him to read the letter a second time ; and when Griffith had done so, asked him whether he would mind—as he, Israel, liked to be clear in all things, and this was a weighty business for a poor man to be engaged in—would he mind saying he did accept, and not merely he would? A sale might go off in the very moment of its prosperity on such an uncertainty as might be here raised by a verbal quibble.

So Griffith, with many misgivings as to the general propriety of his course, but seeing no tangible reason for a refusal, as to mere details, wrote :—

‘If you obtain for me, less five per cent. commission for yourself, fifteen thousand pounds, I hereby authorise you to conclude the sale.’

But Israel wanted something more—and suggested this :—

‘And without waiting for you to communicate

with me, I hereby guarantee to confirm and complete your act as that of my agent and servant.'

'Please add that,' said Israel, 'and then I shan't trouble you any further.'

Griffith could not at the moment look, as he desired to do, in Israel's face; somehow the man overmastered him; and though he did not own that to himself, he did own to a sense of impending danger, and he did try to evade it by a few last moments of reflection, as he bent over his note-book, while seeming merely to correct the phraseology.

But the whole business had become an intolerable burden. Why not, then, shake it off? What could there be to fear? Certainly he would get the fifteen thousand pounds before parting with the mine; Israel could not be ass enough to think of dodging him out of that by postponed payments?

No, the thing was right he was going to do. He had been alarming himself about nothing. He would hesitate no more.

Accordingly he wrote the two letters fairly out, and left them on the table to dry.

And then what better could he do than give free play to the secret interest he felt, and to the amusement he gained as a student of human nature in watching the development of such a character and policy as Israel's under such exceptional circumstances?

The sense of one's own superiority gives great zest to this kind of thing.

So he chatted awhile with Israel, wondering he did not seem more eager to get the coveted documents, if they were coveted.

And Israel chatted on, as if he had forgotten them.

'Well, I hope it won't be long before I get my fifteen thousand pounds, and you your seven hundred and fifty.'

'Ready and willin', sir, I assure you,' responded Israel.

'Why you'll be a millionaire! Seven hundred and fifty pounds! Are you sure you know how much money that is?' asked Griffith laughingly.

'I have handled a few bits of paper when

going to and fro the bank for Mr. Jehoshaphat on some special occasion, that would ha' counted seven hundred and fifty a many times over.'

'And didn't you feel qualmish? Eh?'

'I reklect once wondering how it'd be if one lighted one's pipe with 'em. And that's about all I reklect.'

'Come, Israel, take up your letters.'

Israel did as he was bid. He took up the letters, read them in methodical order—number one, then number two. After that he drew forth a capacious greasy-looking pocket-book, and put them carefully into it one by one.

In the same methodical manner he drew forth a couple of folded papers from the book, placed them on the table, and then returned the book to the safe-keeping of the breast of his coat, which he buttoned closely up.

Taking up one of the two papers, he opened it out, and placed it before Griffith to read.

'Only my idea of the form,' remarked Israel quietly.

And Griffith, who found quite a fund of enjoyment in all these little traits of careful formality, read out the form with grave decorum:—

‘ Israel Mort hereby agrees, on behalf of Griffith Williams, Esquire, of the “ Farm,” as owner of the Cwm Aber Colliery, to sell all his right and interest in the said colliery of Cwm Aber, with whatever privileges belong to it, to _____ for the sum of fifteen thousand pounds, in pursuance of the authority confided to him by the said Griffith Williams ; and the said _____ hereby agrees to buy the said colliery at the said price, and has duly deposited five thousand pounds in advance, as earnest money that the bargain is definitively concluded, at the Bank of Tygroes, which sum now waits the disposition of the said Griffith Williams, and for which the said Israel Mort holds the receipt. The other ten thousand pounds to be paid as soon as the entire property shall be formally given up, and the papers, deeds, &c., that may be found necessary shall be duly prepared and approved on both sides, and signed. The blank for the name of the purchaser, Israel Mort has full authority to insert.

Signature

Witnesses }

Griffith laughed heartily as he read this docu-

ment, which seemed to show Israel was determined there should be no question of payment, provided only the sale could be accomplished.

‘Do you approve of that, sir?’ asked Israel.

‘Quite, quite! Only I fear your customer, if you catch one, will think you ride an uncommonly high horse.’

‘And if at any time from this present speaking you receive a *bonâ fide* document like that, but filled up and signed and witnessed, and the five thousand banked, you will be satisfied to take it as a settled thing?’

‘Not satisfied only, but pleased; pleased, Israel, to see how carefully you have secured me.’

Was it a sudden gleam of sunshine breaking through a cloud in the heavens that so suddenly made Israel’s hard face seem transfigured as he drew forth another paper, a counterpart of the first, *but without blanks*, and placed it before Griffith Williams’s astonished—incredulous eyes?

‘A good servant likes to please a kind master, even to the extent of anticipating his wishes. The job is done. Old Mrs. Williams has, as you there see, bought the mine, paid in the money, and got a counter-part of that dockement.’

CHAPTER XIII.

DIVIDING THE SPOIL.

FEW things are more calculated to try the temper of our humanity than, while engaged in a process of condescending benevolence towards some inferior, to find him turn upon us and expose our movements and motives not only to the ridicule of the world but to our own.

Such was the fate of the amiable and excellent Mr. Williams, when he realised the full force of Israel's manipulation of him, as shown by the production of the completed agreement—only one moment after the right to make such an agreement had been formally and irrevocably conceded.

And he had been studying Israel !

Studying him ? Yes, as the natural philosopher, from the serenest intellectual heights, may, in his

hours of recreation, study the ways and system of an unfamiliar animal when brought in contact with it; that is to say, with all the zest of novelty and conscious skill, and self-possession, till suddenly he receives so severe, so well-directed, and so utterly unexpected a shock to *his* ways and system, as to suggest the idea that it was he who had been the true subject of scientific study and benevolent research.

Griffith's first impulse was to snatch up from the table the agreement for the sale of the mine and tear it into a hundred pieces; but Israel's watchful eye and composed look warned him to pause and reflect before further committing himself.

The story was as yet known in its fulness only to Israel, who would certainly not care to enlighten the neighbours about the details if not provoked. Was it wise, then, to give the provocation that might lead to his being made the laughing-stock of all who knew him?

He saw, too, that Israel evidently did his best to modulate his rough voice and soften his stony features, in the desire to avoid anything like an aspect

of triumph. Still, Griffith's own features reddened with shame as, in the hope of discovering some honest loophole for escape from the bargain, he found he was merely recalling, step by step, the processes by which Israel had guided him—as if he were a mere puppet in his hands—direct to an appointed goal.

‘You will, perhaps, sir, walk down to the bank in the course of the day, and see that it is all right about the money?’ said Israel, after a long pause—a most embarrassing one, surely, to any one but himself.

‘Israel,’ broke out his late employer in passionate anger, ‘what is the meaning of this sharp practice with me? Have you suddenly discovered that I am a liar, vagabond, or rogue—one whose spoken word is not to be trusted?’

‘No, sir, by no means,’ replied Israel, with respect and deference.

‘Then it is you who are——.’ Griffith felt he was going too far, and stopped.

‘It's just this, sir. Seeing for some time past you had so much difficulty to make up your mind, and finding the delay partickler inconvenient and

dangerous, I thought I'd try to help you, when you did get into the mood for action.'

The serious tone in which these words were uttered, and the gravity of Israel's demeanour the while, could not disguise from his former master the contempt that breathed through them.

But it occurred to him that it might be Israel's policy, perhaps, to force from him at once whatever violent things he might be tempted to say in his present state of anger and suspicion; so he checked by a great effort the storm of bitter reproach that was struggling to break forth, and said to Israel with as much of calmness and dignity as the circumstances permitted, while his voice trembled, and his lips were unnaturally pale—

'Israel, you have only yourself to blame if I refuse at this moment either to accept or refuse the bargain you now profess you have made for me, even while you were also professing to be only trying to make it. What I shall do after I have had time to think, and to take counsel, you will doubtless hear in due time. Good morning.'

He went to the door, opened it, and waited for Israel to go.

Israel stood up, and just the slightest tinge of colour—more yellow however than red—suffused his face as he confronted Mr. Griffith Williams.

He moved a few paces towards that gentleman, as if he and not the door were his object. Then as he came close, his tall form erect, his naturally stern face deeper than ever Griffith Williams had yet seen it, in dark intensity and inscrutability of purpose, he said—

‘You owe me, I think, seven hundred and fifty pounds for commission. I will, if you please, call on you to-morrow for that.’

He bowed in his somewhat ungainly fashion, keeping his eyes fixed on Griffith Williams’s face till he was quite outside the door, which was then suddenly slammed after him with terrific violence and noise. This did not, however, prevent Griffith Williams from overhearing a sardonic laugh from the retreating Israel.

That person’s face was serious enough a moment after, as he reflected on all that had been done and said in so momentous an interview.

Presently he stopped at a house, one of the most conspicuous in the village for size and showi-

ness. It stood apart on a little knoll, and was reached by a road that had once belonged exclusively to it, as was still shown by the two tall stone gate pillars, without gates, between which the road passed.

A large garden surrounded the house, where fruit, flowers, and vegetables were inextricably intermingled ; and seemed after long and arduous contests, in which all weaklings had been killed off, to have come to a kind of treaty of peace, founded upon the fact that each had benefited in some part of the place by the law of the strongest.

But it was not for this the garden was famous through the neighbourhood, but for the distorted monstrosities into which some naturally fine evergreens had been trained by the perverse art of the gardener. Animals were imitated with a kind of grotesque success ; also columns, pinnacles, and vases—some of which appeared above the wall, to the edification of all passers-by.

Perhaps the greatest oddity was a large round table of growing box, placed before a real garden seat, and looking so solid on its greenish-yellow

surface that you might fancy it capable of all the uses of a table, till you placed your hand upon it and found how hollow was the pretence.

Such were the horticultural recreations that had for many years occupied the busy and unquiet mind of Mrs. Jehoshaphat Williams, after her separation from her husband, who had always been liberal to her in money matters.

The garden was but a foretaste of the house, with which it was in a kind of ugly harmony. It was filled with curiosities from every clime. The crews of the vessels that trade from this neighbourhood in coals and minerals with all parts of the world knew well where to take an extraordinary shell ; a stuffed nondescript, that might have been in life either a fish or an animal ; a Hindoo god ; a talking parrot ; a Chinese oak, three feet high, bearing acorns, which however refused to be kept alive by Mrs. Jehoshaphat's ministrations ; shark's teeth ; a baby Egyptian mummy ; a cage of love birds ;—all these things, and others of the same kind innumerable, were welcome to old Mrs. Williams ; who, however, would have them at her own price, which was sometimes absurdly low, but

who on the whole paid liberally enough for her fancies.

It was a risky thing for a stranger to wander much about the principal room of reception, between the live valuables, that might any moment attack you, and the dead valuables and other curiosities, that you were every instant in danger of upsetting.

But of all the curiosities of the place, the mistress herself was the greatest curiosity.

She was of low origin, and had once actually worked in the mine under all the influences that accompanied such degrading female labour.

But her vigorous intellect and unstained character protected her ; and commended her to the Overman, Jehosophat Williams, who offered marriage and was accepted.

Too late, Jehoshaphat found that, though his wealth raised him to an equality with his rich neighbours, nothing he could do would persuade the latter to invite his wife to their houses.

He hated her from that time—and did not conceal his hate—and so separation became inevitable.

And thus her whole life led to the perversion of tastes and activities that ought to have made her a comfort to herself and a blessing to others. Having no acknowledged duties or responsibilities ; no friends or acquaintances ; separated from her husband ; being unable, through bodily infirmity, to seek health of mind and body in an out-of-door life ; having no deep inner religious faith or fixed moral principle to elevate or guide her ; the very strength of her mind and character, and the easy pecuniary circumstances she enjoyed (her husband having engaged to pay her five hundred a year when they separated), all tended to make her eccentric, morbid, and find pleasure in habits which, under more natural circumstances, she would have been the first to condemn and loathe.

Upon her, as upon Israel, the question of the mine had come as one of new life. They met frequently about it, at first without any kind of concealment, and on matters that were of no particular moment to any but themselves. But when Israel found her so much interested in the mine, he opened to her the same view of a bril-

liant future that he had suggested to Mr. Griffith Williams ; and thus by the time he had grown sick of the hesitation and weakness of the one, he found the other ripe to take the place which he soon made for her.

All their later meetings and discussions had been at night, and had been so skilfully disguised, that Griffith Williams had not the least suspicion of them till he found himself face to face with their results.

Never had the aged lady looked with so little interest upon her curiosities as now, on this morning, when she is expecting, with all the anxiety of an unaccustomed and ardent speculator, Israel's return to her with the news of his success or failure as to the proposed purchase.

This is one of her ailing days, and she is in bed. But she doesn't mind receiving company on such occasions ! She will even do no inconsiderable portion of her toilet before visitors—Israel for instance—who certainly cares as little about the matter as herself. From her bed, which is disposed expressly for that purpose, she can see far down the valley, and thus she saw Israel

at last, coming up the hill, and rated him in her heart for his slowness and impassiveness.

‘Does nothing ever move him out of himself, I wonder?’ she says irritably. ‘Why can’t he either shake his head, or give a joyous wave of his hat? Look now at his face. Who could guess which way things have gone? Ah! I understand—nothing is settled. And it is I who am an old fool to be so eager!’

Then she remembered her nightcap, and threw that off, and tossed over her grey hairs and her shoulders a brightly variegated shawl, drew the bed-clothes round her, and waited; evidently troubling no further about her personal appearance.

When Israel entered the room, he attempted something like a genial smile, and at once placed before her the completed agreement, and the guarantee he had received from Mr. Griffith Williams, which, without any kind of reserve, authorised him to conclude the bargain for the sale of the mine; and which, therefore, he had concluded.

‘All settled? Everything made quite safe? Are you sure he can’t go back?’ demanded the

old woman, almost breathless with eagerness and desire.

‘If you had seen his face when I produced the complete agreement, and told him the money was in the bank, you wouldn’t ask that. He *was* going to tear it up, but bethought him in time he had better not.’

‘Well done, Israel! Well done! And now for your reward,’ said Mrs. Williams, settling herself in her easy-chair.

‘Ay; now for my reward!’ responded Israel.

‘Well; I suppose it’s a question of salary and position—eh?’

‘And pray, ma’am,’ was Israel’s somewhat evasive answer, ‘what may you think about those matters?’

‘That I shall be liberal—liberal, Israel, and have done with the subject—I hate bargaining! Don’t you?’

‘That depends,’ remarked Israel, whose eye seemed to glitter in the dark corner where he was, with light and significance.

‘True,’ said the old lady laughing; ‘that’s true. I propose, then, three hundred a year.’

She paused and waited, as if expecting some show of pleasure or gratitude.

‘That’s fair,’ said Israel; but the tone would have been just as suitable if he had said that’s unfair. ‘And about the power, ma’am?’

‘Well, you know I can’t manage the mine myself; but I may help by advice.’

‘Of course, then, you share the responsibility of accidents, and so on?’

‘I! Is the man mad? What do I pay you for but to keep me safe?’

‘That’s what I thought, ma’am, but mines are like wives, and can’t afford two husbands.’

The joke, such as it was, tickled the old lady’s fancy hugely; she laughed till she brought on her cough, and when they settled again to business, Israel had that which he strove for—undivided power in the ordinary management.

‘And is that all? Are you now satisfied?’

‘All? Satisfied?’ Did Mrs. Jehoshaphat ever forget the look Israel fixed upon her, in answer to this very natural question; a look that made her truly believe for the moment she had, however unintentionally, committed upon him some atro-

cious wrong. 'Why, Mrs. Jehoshaphat, what about my share? Haven't I earned it honestly?'

'Share! Earned! Here! Dick! DICK! DICK! I say!' She screamed out the last of her three calls at the very top of her cracked voice, and presently came lumbering in the youth with whom the reader made acquaintance in an early chapter.

He did not seem alarmed nor excited, but simply stood and stared, with stupid, half-sleepy eyes, first at his mistress, then at Israel, and finding no response, began to yawn, and heave his shoulders, and look round as if used to such summonses, and was already meditating a retreat.

'Dick, you dolt, open your eyes and see if this man's a maniac. You can shoulder a pitchfork, I suppose, to protect me, can't you? Why, Dick, the man wants me to give him my property! Wants a great slice out of the mine!'

Therewith she began to laugh, till again stopped by her enemy the cough.

'Have you done, ma'am, with Dick?' asked the imperturbable Israel.

'Don't know,' responded the old lady, eyeing

Israel with a look where interest, almost admiration, seemed to contend with suspicion and fear.

‘Well, ma’am, we can call him again, you know.’

Mrs. Jehoshaphat turned her head away. When she again turned, Israel was leading the gaping rustic out by the ear through the door. He did not resist, but fixed his eyes in a kind of horror and stupendous wonder immovably upon Israel’s face till he was shut out.

‘I think, ma’am, you agreed with me that if the mine couldn’t be got for less than twenty-two thousand pounds, it would be worth taking at that price?’

‘But you’ve settled that—and got it for fifteen.’

‘I think, ma’am, too, you afterwards said you would even stretch a point, and go to five hundred more? That’s my case, ma’am.’

‘The man’s gone clean out of his senses, and forgets he has but just given me the agreement for fifteen thousand pounds only.’

‘Now, ma’am, I shan’t trouble you much longer, nor with many more words. Twenty-two thousand five hundred pounds is the value you set

upon the mine ; suppose we call that three shares of seven thousand five hundred each. You take two, for which you have paid the money, and I take one—my own—ay, honestly mine ; for did I not save it out of the bargain ?’

‘ And have you any document, letter, or witness to prove any kind of right ?’

‘ No ; only you yourself, ma’am. But then I believe in you.’

‘ Oh, you believe in me, do you ?’ screamed the old lady.

‘ Yes, because you are a sensible woman, a strong woman, and can understand the mine would just ruin you—if you were left to it without me—under all its dangers, and the need there is for doing a deal directly.’

Then, after a pause, Israel told her the whole story in detail of Mr. Barrett’s discharge in consequence of the discovery about the maps ; and made her plainly understand no living man but himself had the knowledge requisite for safely and profitably working the mine.

Mrs. Jehoshaphat’s face showed how thoroughly she was enlightened now. She gazed on Israel.

haughtily, defyingly, passionately ; but if his features had been of iron they could not have shown less sensitiveness to her searching looks.

‘ And this is you, Israel, is it? The man I so trusted?’

‘ No, ma’am, it’s only a part of me—as you shall find if you do right by me. I will be a faithful servant to the concern—a faithful partner to you, but only on these terms.’

‘ And if I refuse?’

‘ Then I take myself and my plans off, and try my fate elsewhere.’

‘ After all these years?’

‘ Ay,’ said Israel, and for the first time his voice seemed to thrill with emotion. ‘ Ay, after all these years! That will be hard lines, ma’am ; but don’t deceive yourself, I shall go, unless——’

‘ And then,’ suddenly burst out the old woman, ‘ Griffith may dispute the sale, and my money be locked up, and I be ruined!’

‘ He can’t—he shan’t dispute the sale, whether I go or stay,’ said Israel ; ‘ I have nailed him fast. He can move nohow against us except to his own

injury. He'll try to-morrow to get off the commission, but——'

'Commission! Commission from him besides!'

'Why not?'

'How much?'

'Five per cent, ma'am.'

'How much is that?'

'Seven hundred and fifty pounds!'

'Seven hundred and what?' screamed Mrs. Jehoshaphat.

'His money, ma'am, not yours!'

'Israel, I am beat—dead beat. You're a deal too much for me. Get ready your papers as partner, and I will sign them, and try you.'

'Try me? No, ma'am, trust me. That's the word. No man ever did really trust me, in things where it was right he should trust me, and was deceived. The world fights for place and money and power, and I fight too. I never once told Mr. Griffith Williams to look for any other help, or for any other bargain from me than exactly that which he got. Ask him, ma'am, if that be true.'

‘Do you want a memorandum at once, or will you take my word?’

‘I’d like the memorandum, but——’ here he hesitated a moment. ‘No, ma’am : say again that one-third of the mine belongs to me, and I’ll wait the lawyer’s time.’

‘I’m a great fool, I suppose ;—I must be—but there—Israel, there’s something about you I like, and I shan’t let you or your wife be in doubt. Write me a few lines. Go there to the table. There’s pen and ink somewhere about. Ha, monster!’ she suddenly shrieked out, as a cry of pain reached her from her favourite pug ; ‘you have trodden on my dog!’

‘Beg pardon, ma’am, I’m sure.’

Israel for the first time grew confused, as he saw the cringing creature at his feet, and he stooped to pat it with as much of tenderness as was possible to him, but received so vicious a snap of his fingers as made the old lady laugh heartily, and brought back Israel’s stony look.

The document was written and signed, and within five minutes Israel was again in the open

air, hardly knowing for the moment which way he was going, unable to think of anything but the tremendous fact—here was he, the boy who had slaved as the collier's drudge, then as the collier, then as the Deputy, then as the Overman, suddenly emerging from the darkness and squalor of so many years into the brightness and glory of wealth, position, power! Yes, it was true! All true! He—Israel—was a mine-owner, was worth seven thousand five hundred pounds in mine property, which he knew to be worth far more than it cost; he had, meantime, seven hundred and fifty pounds of hard cash to go on with, and above and before all he was master in the domain where he had so long toiled, and suffered every possible humiliation.

CHAPTER XIV.

FIRST DAY OF POWER.

FOR the first time for many years—more even than he could remember—Israel had a sleepless night, following the day that revolutionised his fortunes.

For the first time also, after an equally long interval, did he dream, or at least do the thing nearest to dreaming that his not very imaginative nature permitted.

He gave way to the tide of emotion that flowed in upon him, while letting his thoughts sway hither and thither as they pleased, knowing how easy it was for him to bring them back, and compel them into the appointed channel.

He thought of David—his rebellious, and yet timid boy, and as he thought, somehow the lad's instincts as regarded the mine appeared less

unmanly and more deserving of attention than before; and he went so far as to speculate as to the possibilities before many years were gone of raising him to be at once a gentleman and a mine-owner—as his partner. ‘Israel Mort and Son,’ he thought would sound well some day.

He thought also of his wife; but that kind of thinking was too much out of his way for him to dwell long on it. She was asleep, but he woke her, to ask,

‘Do you think old Simon would take twenty pounds a year for that house and garden?’

‘Yes. But nobody seems inclined to make him an offer.’

‘As soon as you have had your breakfast, go to him and say if he will I think I can find him a tenant.’

‘Very well.’

Again silence. The wife rose and began to dress. And, again, Israel spake after a little while:—

‘Barrett has left the neighbourhood and gone far away into Scotland. He has let his house, but hasn’t managed to dispose of his furniture, which would cost too much to remove. Set somebody

—not yourself, mind, for Barrett hates me—set somebody, I say, to find out the lowest he will take.'

'I happen to know, for I have been all over it with a neighbour.'

'How much?'

'Sixty pounds.'

'Sixty! H'm! Let me see.' And Israel, whose memory was prodigious, who forgot nothing he cared to remember, but would sometimes remark almost plaintively, he also forgot nothing of things he would be only too glad to forget, began to run through the furniture item by item, and value each as he went on. 'Too cheap! Something wrong. No. I see. He can't help himself. No market here. So like a sensible man, he accepts the inevitable. Buy it.'

'Buy it, Israel!' echoed Mrs. Mort in wonder, almost alarm.

'I said buy it! If they doubt you, refer to me, or to Mrs. Jehoshaphat Williams.'

'For you! for us!' faltered the unhappy woman, as if overpowered by these symptoms of coming prosperity.

‘For us!’ said Israel. ‘Pray attend. Get the house as cheap as you can. Buy the furniture for the price asked. Remove from here as quick as possible. Putting both lots together, the new house should be decently well filled. But I authorise you to lay out, to the extent of twenty pounds more, to bring all things to a kind of level; also I authorise you to lay out ten pounds for yourself in clothes, ten pounds for me in linen and things; the tailor I’ll see to; and as to David, we’ll look to him afterwards.’

‘Oh, Israel, Israel, Israel, has all this come honestly about?’

‘Woman, dare you suspect otherwise? But there, I ought not to be surprised. You’ll find all right. Do you believe me?’ he demanded, looking her sternly, yet openly in the face.

‘Yes, yes; I do now! I do.’

As soon as she had gone downstairs Israel rose. His first care, when dressed, was to go to a little table where he was often accustomed to sit and write, and go over business matters connected with the mine, when the one living-room below was occupied with the preparations for the

meal. Taking his memorandum-book from his pocket, he wrote in it as follows, in a bold large handwriting :—

‘June 1, 18—. This day, at the age of 49, after forty-three years of hard labour, and wages beginning at 5s. a week, and ending at 30s. a week, I begin life afresh, manager at 300*l.* a year; with no debts, and cash in hand (commission) 750*l.*, and Mine-Owner to the extent of a third share, valued at 7,500*l.* I write this down, in order that when I look back, say after ten or a dozen years, I may see whether I have made as good use of the advantages of this position, as I have made of the disadvantages of my old one.

‘I say certainly I ought. I am strong, hardly ever ill. I time now my pulse beating seventy beats a minute, each one full, with not a bit of hurry or jumping; just the pulse to let a man go anywhere and do anything that’s in his nature to do. Thanks be to God. ‘ISRAEL MORT.’

He read this after writing it, then paused with a strange look of dissatisfaction, yet also of something

higher, better, softening, and improving his features that was impossible to define. Then he took his pen, and was about to strike out the last four words he had written, and in fact he did cross with a line of erasure half the word 'Thanks' before he stopped to reflect.

He seemed puzzled that he had written thus—puzzled to remember that the words had dropped unconsciously from him; for he knew well how little he had been accustomed to ascribe anything to a higher power; and believed that people all about him, who did this sort of thing, did it either from motives of hypocrisy, or from the intellectual weakness that makes the bulk of us accept as implicitly true whatever we are told.

But on reflection Israel could not discover that he had ever precisely determined either that God did not exist, or that existing, His relations with men might not from time to time be calculated to call forth a grateful acknowledgment from them. In fact, Israel began to suspect he had only looked at God, through the weaknesses, follies, and selfishnesses of his fellow-men; and in looking had found the latter so engross him that his vision had

failed of their final solemn quest, and so he had remained spiritually dark as ever.

He must look to this by-and-by. Meantime he would let the sentence stand.

A voice at this moment ascended from below, calling him. He went down and found the night-deputy there, Rees Thomas.

The deputy looked sad, yet resolute, as if conscious he had come upon an unhappy errand.

‘Israel Mort, I must deal fairly with thee, so I tell thee I went last night to ask Mr. Griffith Williams to interpose between thee and me in this matter of saying prayers before beginning work at the mine.’

‘Ay, as usual, going wrong in one thing leads pretty quick to going wrong in another,’ replied Israel sharply, yet as if not quite forgetting his own recent movement against Mr. Barrett. ‘And what did he say?’

‘That he had ceased to be owner, and that I had better go to Mrs. Jehoshaphat Williams, to whom it now belongs.’

‘Not entirely, Rees Thomas. I have a little share in the job.’

‘You! A share! You! partner!’

‘Ay, does the idea seem ridiculous?’

‘On the contrary, I know no man better fitted for nor more deserving of such good fortune except in the one thing needful, which lacking, all else is worthless.’

‘Now, Rees Thomas, this is my first day of power, and I have neither time nor thoughts to spare except for useful things. Do you apologise for disobedience to orders?’

‘No,’ responded the deputy firmly, yet closing his eyes as in pain.

‘Think well. You know not what I intend.’

The deputy gazed eagerly in Israel’s face, as if new light had broken upon him.

‘Do you mean that if I apologise—and my Father in Heaven knows how heartily I could do that if only I can see my way honestly; but I will honestly, Israel, try—if that be all, I will try—Do *you* mean that then you will yourself sanction—’

Something in this speech jarred upon the hearer; he relapsed into his old imperiousness of command, and, whatever his thoughts or purposes, he simply said, and with his ordinary harshness of voice—

‘Rees Thomas, if you come here to question me the sooner you go again the better. Apologise and take the situation of Overman, which I will make one unusually profitable for you—or take notice to leave this day month.’

‘And may I the while do what I am called to?’

‘No!’ thundered Israel, his patience utterly exhausted.

‘Farewell, then! I wish you no evil; on the contrary, I wish you every true good. Israel Mort, I have felt strangely inclined towards thee many, many times. I have thought about thee—I have prayed for thee—I have asked God if He would not do what I could not, make thee a chosen vessel for His glory. Thou hast gifts that might make thee a leader among men, but thou pervertest them; and I now tell thee, that until thou changest, heart and soul, and listenest to the words that have been spoken to us all, but specially to thee and such as thee, I say, unless thou bendest thy stiffened neck, and causeth the hardness of thy heart to melt, thou never wilt, never shalt, enter into the kingdom of heaven that thou dost not seek, or into the kingdom of earth that

thou dost seek. Farewell! I go not again into the mine, but will seek my bread where else it may be found. James Lusty and John Lewis can do all between them that is needed till thou findest a Deputy to suit thee. They have promised that. Farewell!’

Israel made no response, but gazed sternly and bitterly at the retreating figure; which paused at the threshold and looked back, as if still hoping for some change, but seeing none, went out, and closed the door very softly after him.

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